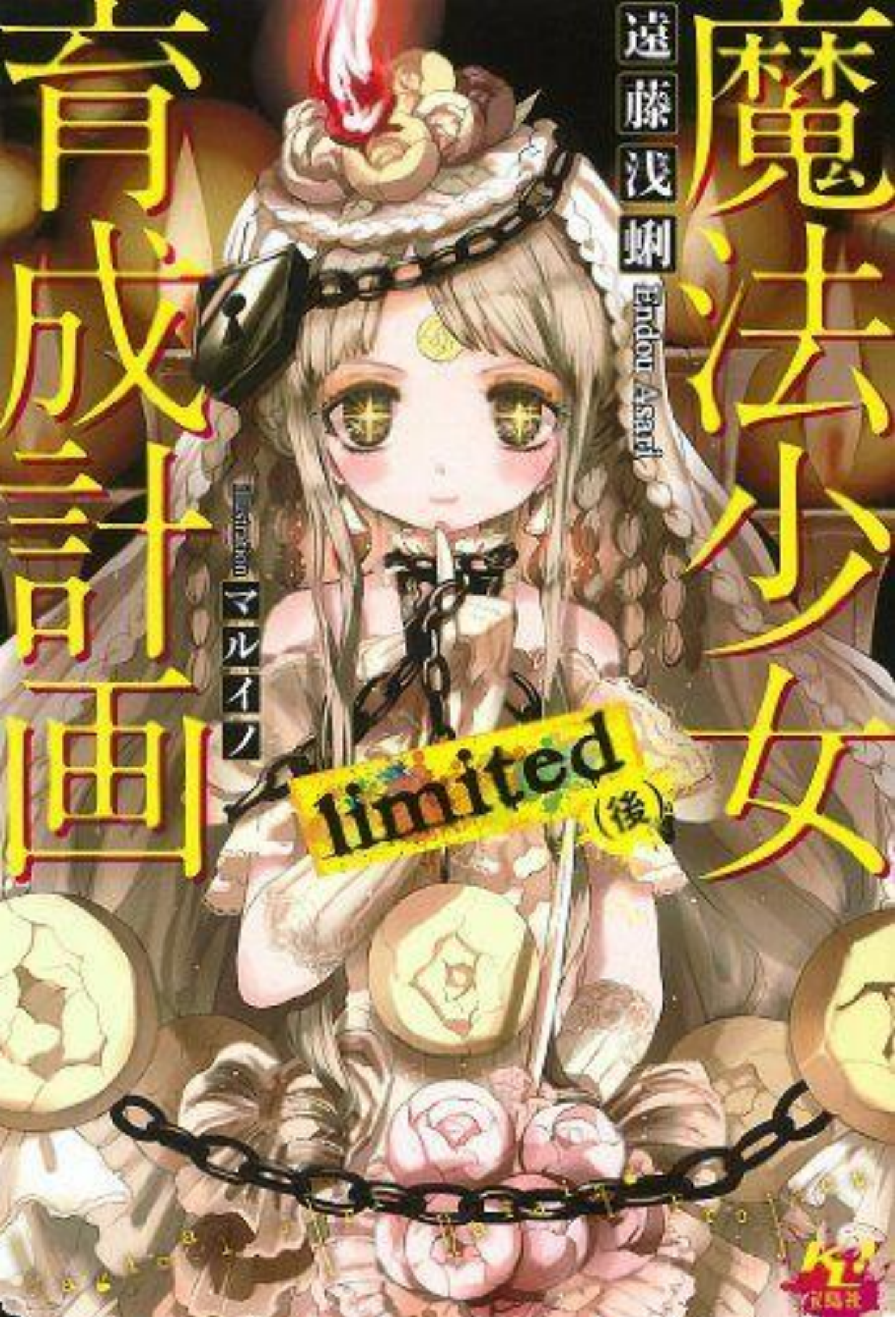
魔法少女
育成計画
limited
(前)
遠藤浅蜊
Endou Asari
illustration
マルイノ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魔法少女育成計画
limited (後)

キャプテン・グレース

すごくかっこいい魔法の
海賊船を出せるよ

ウェディン

約束をしたらそれを
ぜったい守らせるよ

ファニートリック

離したものと別のものを
入れ替えるよ

レイン・ボウ

実体を持つ虹の橋を
作り出せるよ

ポストリィ

どんなものでも
持ち主のもとに
送り返せるよ

テブセケメイ

風と同化して
どこへでも
行けるよ

くるくるしめ
繰々姫

何本ものリボンを
自由自在に操るよ

マナ

呪文と儀式でいろんな
魔法を使うよ

げこくじょうはな
下克上羽菜

感覚をものすごく
鋭くできるよ

ななこさん
7753

相手の能力がわかる
魔法のゴーグルを使うよ

魔王パム

四枚の黒くて
大きな羽で戦うよ

リップル

手裏剣を投げれば
百発百中だよ

ピティ・フレデリカ

水晶玉に好きな
相手の姿を映し出すよ

トットポップ

魔法のギターで実体のある
音符を作り出すよ

プキン

魔法の剣で刺した
相手の考えを変えさせるよ

ソニア・ビーン

さわったものをすぐ
ボロボロにしちゃうよ

Prologue

The life of a teacher is oftentimes misunderstood by their students.

Students often think of teachers as instructors and people that give work, assignments, and tests. Some students would even see teachers as resentful things, and would avoid them if possible.

Oftentimes, if you have the right personality, you might be able to bond with some of your students, but there will always be the other ones that think like the rest.

Years of teaching at Namiyama High School has made Nozomi Himeno aware of this fact. She had accepted it. Some students would groan. They are teenagers after all.

The reality of teaching is far from what students thought it was.

As a teacher, Nozomi had to divide her attention between her students, ensuring that they have the best education to survive the real world.

Some kids require special attention because they're falling back. Those kids she would always prioritize. After all, they're the ones that needed the most help.

There are also children who excel at their classwork. Those kids she would challenge more. Not because she despised them, but because she believed in them.

She also had to grade their work and assignments, and if someone is struggling, she'd schedule a session with them to help them, though they often took this as a *bad* thing.

Nozomi cared for her students, but not everyone could see that.

After lunch, Nozomi went to do her usual patrol rounds.

Students would often hide around so they won't have to attend class. The most frequented hiding spot however, is the roof of the school.

Normally, it's a good hangout spot, but the school roof is pretty dangerous. There are no safety railings for the students, which is a safety hazard all by itself.

When Nozomi arrived at the stairs leading up to the rooftop, she found 3 girls sitting down eating their lunch on the stairwell.

“Ah, that reminds me. Time for class, guys!”

“Yeah, we should hurry it up, the *Monster*’s gonna get us if we don’t”

“Monster?”

“I’ll tell you about it in the hallway”

Nozomi heard the girls talking from a distance. When she turned the corner to climb the stairs, she was face-to-face with them.

One of the girls had a surprised look on her face.

“Ah, Miss Himeno. Excuse us!” she said as she bowed down.

The girls dragged their friends towards class, talking and laughing as they walked away from Nozomi.

Nozomi, however, was climbing up the stairs to make sure there were no other kids on the roof.

A quick sweep, then locking the door towards the roof. Done.

The loud chime of the school bell rang across the building. Time to teach once more. Nozomi walked back towards her classroom.

The lockers and hallways of the school were devoid and empty. Most of the students had already retreated back to class, save for one or two strays that are still running to get there.

Just a corner turn away until Nozomi would reach her class.

“Seriously guys, who’s this *Monster* you’re talking about? School ghost?”

“No, it’s nothing like that. It’s a nickname. You really don’t know?”

Nozomi stopped just before she turned the corner. She heard the three girls from before, talking a bit loudly. They hadn’t seemed to notice Nozomi around the corner.

“Ms. Himeno’s nickname is *Monster*.”

“Huh? Why’s that?”

“I mean, look at her. She thinks she’s so much better than all of us. Looks so innocent and childlike, but still gives us ridiculous amounts of work. Don’t say it in front of her, though.”

“Ah, I see, I see”

Nozomi stood still.

Her heart sank. She never wanted to come off as strict to her students. She just wanted to help them grow into their potential.

It’s true that she had a babyface, and perhaps that contributed to her childlike appearance. Could it be that these kids are so into that appearance that they didn’t expect a serious hard-working teacher?

With a deep breath and a sigh, Nozomi proceeded down the corner into class.

Nozomi Himeno is a language arts teacher.

However, she is also many other things within the school. She helps with extracurriculer activities, she often stays late to organize events, and she even takes time out of her day to help the kids who are struggling.

Despite, or perhaps because of it, a lot of the kids have treated Nozomi a little differently than the other teachers.

Mr. Watanabe, a nice guy, has been nicknamed Nabe-San by the kids. He often tells jokes in class, and is a laugh to be around.

Ms. Kobayashi, a sweet teacher, was often very motherly to her students. She was given the nickname of Koba-Sen.

So why is it that Nozomi, who tries so hard to get along with her students, gets the nickname *Monster*?

She disliked it, but she's used to it. After all, it's been a year since she got the nickname.

It won't deter her from her work, however. The most important thing on any teachers mind is the well-being of their students, regardless of how the student feels about the teachers.

And so another day of classes begins and ends.

After the kids all went home, Nozomi locked the classroom door. The day was over, but it wasn't time for Nozomi to head back just yet.

Today, there was something she had to do. A group meeting of sorts in the Science Lab.

No extracurricular activities ever take place in the Science Lab, so it was usually quiet and empty.

Nozomi stood in front of the door. She fumbled in her pockets to find the right key. Then, she inserted it to the door.

Click

That's when she found out it wouldn't turn. Because apparently the door was never locked. Which means the teacher that was teaching here didn't bother to lock the door when they left.

Locking classroom doors is a habit for Nozomi, but forgetting to lock the Science Lab was just a dangerous thing to do.

Still, as long as there were no kids playing around with dangerous equipment, she should be fine.

With a push of her hand, she opened the door, and inside were 5 girls, all doing their own thing, presumably waiting for Nozomi to show up.

This was the meeting she had been assigned to.

However, she wasn't expecting the other kids to be earlier than her. Sometimes they could surprise her.

First, there was the athlete of the school. She was hiding her black eye, must've gotten it from a school fight. Her hair tied behind her in a ponytail.

Umi Shihabara, known for her amazing athletic abilities. She held the district's record for the High School 100-meter dash.

Next to her was a close friend, Kayo Nemura. The two were sitting next to each other, probably talking before Nozomi had arrived.

On the back of the room, staring at the aquarium where the Science Lab's pet turtle lived, was Honor Student Mine Musubiya.

The 3 of those girls were 11th graders.

In the corner of the room were two 10th years, Tatsuko Sakaki, with her glasses, and Kaori Ninotsugi, with her long tied hair.

The two 10th graders were shy and nervous, perhaps because they were outnumbered by their seniors. Nozomi herself doesn't really teach 10th years, but she made it a point to remember their names when they were chosen.

The reason all these girls were here is because of the School Culture Festival. Or rather, the fact of cleaning up for it.

When the Student Council asked for volunteers for cleanup duty, no student even bothered to raise their hand. So the Council decided to do a lottery, and these 5 were chosen.

If you think about it, who would *want* to volunteer for cleanup duty for a big event like this? Maybe a saint, but not anyone that hated the concept of cleaning up after other people.

A lot of the students joked that these 5 were the *sacrificial lambs* because they had to clean up after whatever the other kids in the school were going to do, and the Culture Festival is a *huge* event.

Needless to say, none of them were too pleased when they were chosen.

For Nozomi, this might mean more work and grumpier students. Just the usual, really.

For her though, maybe she could get these kids to get along, and maybe she could form them into a team. She wasn't sure how clean-up duty can be spun into something exciting, but as a teacher, she'll find a way.

Besides, looking at the clock, it's 5 minutes before the scheduled meeting, which means these girls were early. Might not be a sign of excitement, but it's a start.

Chapter 1:
Magical Girl Army, Form Up!

☆ **Postarie**

Tatsuko Sakaki had been a shy girl since she was a young girl, so when she was selected by the Student Council to be a part of the Cleanup committee, her heart skipped a beat.

Fortunately for her, she was relieved when it was announced that a classmate and close friend of hers, Kaori, was also chosen by the lottery. The chances were slim, but at least she got a friend.

Tatsuko was not used to working with other people, due to her shy personality, but with a friend, she might be able to make it through.

Alongside Kaori, they both went towards the Science Lab. The door was unlocked, and when they entered, they only saw one girl, sitting and waiting.

Tatsuko immediately had shivers down her spine. This was a senior. She wasn't in her grade at all. If she had trouble speaking to friends her age, how was she going to handle speaking with her?

"You two part of the clean up crew too?" asked the senior.

"Y-Yes, we are," answered Kaori.

No sooner did those words come out of her friend's mouth that the door slammed open once more.

Strutting down the Science Lab were two more senior girls. This one's a bit more popular than the rest.

Athletic champion Umi Shihabara.

All the kids at school know about her. She was considered the most athletic kid in school, and there were rumors about her strength and rowdiness.

Her sports medals are proof of just how physically fit she was. Even from her face, you could see the determination in her eyes.

The more people that show up, the more Tatsuko was convinced that this lottery was a curse.

Umi took a deep breath, and she looked over to the other girl, her friend perhaps, and exclaimed loudly.

“Ahh, you smell that? *That* is the smell of *adventure*!”

So confident. Way beyond Tatsuko’s league. The gang here are truly randomized, but Tatsuko probably wouldn’t fit in, if it weren’t for Kaori.

As if on a pattern, the door opened once more. This time, a familiar face. One of the teachers of the school had entered.

Ms. Himeno.

Most of the others in Tatsuko’s class sometimes call her *Monster*. Probably because her looks transcend her age.

Her face looks younger than Tatsuko, but she’s in her 20s.

Even though the other kids might make fun of Ms. Himeno, Tatsuko wouldn’t do such a thing. Tatsuko wouldn’t even be capable of it.

“Ah, Teach is here! So, let’s start!” exclaimed Umi loudly.

“Well, we still have 5 more minutes,” said Ms. Himeno, pulling out a chair from one of the tables to sit on.

“Whaat? C’mon, the faster we get started, the faster we can actually finish up!” complained Umi once again.

The sky outside was orange. The sunset illuminated the classroom with that hue of the end of the day.

It’s going to be Winter soon, and with that, the end of the school year. Most of the students were excited for the holidays, and many of them have gotten lazier as the school year begins to come to a close.

“Aha! You’re all finally here! Wonderful! Great! Awesome!”

There was a voice that came from above. A small, childlike voice. In a High School, there wouldn’t be any little girls. Most kids were around 16 at the youngest.

So where did that childlike voice come from?

“Hey, hey! Up here!”

A white small figure, dressed in all white, descended downwards from the ceiling of the Science Lab.

This was a miniature girl. A miniature girl was floating down. Tatsuko didn’t know just how to react.

“My name is Toko! As you can see, I’m a Fairy! Nice to meetcha all!”

Just what is going on here?

“You all have the best magical potential, so you’ve all been fated and destined to be chosen at this spot! Guess what? You’re all going to become *Magical Girls*!”
Magical Girls?

This fairy thing, Toko, was talking too fast. There was too much information that needed to be processed. Tatsuko wasn’t even mentally prepared for this.

By the stunned look on everyone’s faces, neither were they.

“I have to ask you all for your help! I’m being chased by a very bad, very evil witch! I need magical girls to protect me! I can make you into one! You’ll have awesome powers, *and* you’ll fight for justice! So, get ready for all your lives to be changed!”

Toko waved her wand around, and suddenly everyone was covered by a bright white light.

Tatsuko wanted to scream in shock, but she couldn’t even find the strength or the reaction to do so.

The light engulfed her body, the brightness pierced her eyelids, so much so that Tatsuko closed her eyes in fear. Her heart was thumping, and then… the shining stopped.

When Tatsuko opened her eyes, the first thing she did was to look for her friend.

Kaori, where was she? Was she okay? What was that light.

When she glanced at Kaori's direction, what she saw was not Kaori. Instead, sitting at Kaori's seat was a beautiful girl.

Braided hair, red on the ends of each braid, yet a light brown hair color, the colors seamlessly changing into each other.

Her facial features were perfectly placed, like a manufactured doll designed to look pretty.

She had a small halo above her, floating just a bit above her head. How is that possible? Was there a wire somewhere?

The suit she was wearing was something that came out of a fashion show. Flashy, out-of-this world.

She even had some kind of tail behind her.

But the most striking visual appearance, was the large round circular ring on her back, floating just as well, radiating with the colors of the rainbow.

Who was this girl?

And why did she suddenly grasp Tatsuko's arm in shock.

"T-Ta-Chan?"

The rainbow girl called her Ta-Chan. That's Kaori's nickname for Tatsuko. How did she know.

How did this girl know? Is this girl who Tatsuko thinks she is.

“AAAAAH!”

A scream from the other side of the room.

Looking around, there was a blue shirted pirate and a stage magician screaming and pointing at each other.

Then, there was another girl sitting with a wedding gown.

And then… most peculiarly, floating in the air, was what looked like an Arabian-styled genie, floating upside down.

What is going on?

Tatsuko looked outside the window to see if she was still at school. However, what caught her attention was the reflection on that window.

A beautiful girl, with green hair, dressed like a mail girl. A deliverywoman.

Red suit, and Tatsuko could see small wings coming out from her waist.

Who was this beautiful girl, and why was she in the window reflection.

Tatsuko’s mind then finally made the connections. Everything clicked.

Tatsuko touched her cheeks, and the mail girl also touched hers in the reflection. It dawned on her.

This was Tatsuko. Which means… Which means…

“HUH!?”

☆ **Captain Grace**

Umi Shihabara loves adventure.

As a child, she wanted to see the world. She wanted to experience the wonders in story books and adventure novels.

She wanted to become a hero and an explorer.

Unfortunately for Umi, she was born in a small village near a mountainside, so it's not like she could actually go anywhere in her childhood.

Most of the time, she had spent her daily activities playing around in the rivers and forests nearby.

By the time her parents had saved up to move to the city for better education, Umi had developed a knack for adventure and a strong physical body as well.

She had surprised the kids at her school with her amazing athletic abilities, which she honed through her time jumping and climbing through the treetops.

Mastering these skills quickly made Umi soar in popularity. It made it easier for Umi to make friends with the others, but it also made it easier for her to make enemies.

Umi had loyal friends, but would also have bullies that would try to bring her down. Her response to those is to defy them at every turning point, which can sometimes lead to fights that get her in trouble.

But she also had loyal friends as well. One of them being Kayo Nemura, who had always stuck with her till the end. Now, in High School, together with Kayo, she continues her streak of adventures, or as close as she can get to being one.

However, today had been strange, even for Umi.

After what seemed to be a fairy floating down from the sky, Umi had been transformed into a blue-shirted pirate, with a ballerina-style skirt. Not to mention, she seemed to have the pirate hat *and* the pirate hook as well.

She looked at her reflection in the window. Sure enough, she saw her new self, dressed like a pirate.

From around the room, she could hear the other girls loudly exclaim their disbelief.

"W-W-What!? Fairies? Magical Girls?"

"Am I on *Candid Camera* or something!? Where's the hidden cameras, huh?"

"Is this some kind of joke!? How'd I get dressed in this outfit so suddenly!?"

She noticed a cutlass sheathed on her hip. Gently, she grabbed on to it, and pulled it out, hearing the distinct noise that the blade makes as it slides across the sheath.

The sight of the cutlass is too real to be true. This is a classic pirate weapon, and Umi was holding it in her hand.

With her other thumb, she lightly pressed the edge of the sword.

“Ouch… Gah”

The sharp pain was enough for her to instinctively jerk her thumb away from the blade.

The cutlass was real, and it was extremely sharp.

Umi had transformed into something powerful. She could feel her energy rising, her strength increased.

This new body…

…She was Umi, but she had also transformed. She was infinitely better than before. This is what true strength and power felt like.

The strength and power of an adventurer.

“Alright! Tranfsormation complete!” yelled the tiny Fairy’s voice once more.

The creature, who looked just like a tiny human, identified herself as Toko. She flew around the Science Lab, fluttering about ecstatically.

“Now you’re *all* Magical Girls! You can definitely defeat the evil witch that’s after me!”

Umi immediately struck a gutsy pose, and turned around to her classmates. With a fist pumped in the air, she smiled, and loudly proclaimed,

“Aha! So what should we do, huh? There’s an evil witch coming to get us, we’re gonna have to stop her right?”

“Correct! To do that, I’ve given you amazing strength and skill! Magical Girls are infinitely more powerful than regular humans! Not only that, each and every one of you possesses a unique power!”

With a flutter of her wand, a bright light formed on each of their palms, and as it settled back, a strange heart-shaped device was held in front of them.

“This is your personal Magical Phone! Each Magical Girl gets one! With this, you can transform into your form anytime you like! Not only that, it also lists important stuff like your stats, your abilities, and even a small picture of yourself! Oh, and of course, it’s also a phone!”

Toko went across each and every one of the girls, darting around the room as she spoke each of her sentences.

Umi turned her phone on. On the first screen was a chibified picture of her, dressed up like a Magical Girl.

In large letters, she could see the name displayed in the center.

Captain Grace
Magical Skill: To Summon an Awesome Pirate Ship

“Captain Grace, huh? Nice name. Hey, Kayo, what’d you get?”

“Huh? U-Um…”

Kayo, who had been transformed into some kind of stage magician, nervously opened her phone. Fumbling through it until she managed to turn it on.

Umi couldn’t help but sneak a glance at it,

Funny Trick
Magical Skill: Able to Replace Hidden Objects into Something Else

“Awesome power! This is pretty cool, don’t you think?” said Umi with a smile.

“Wha-NO! I don’t understand!” screamed Kayo.

“What’s not to understand? You’ve got your name right there, and then that’s what you could do. It’s pretty straightforward if you ask me”

“Th-That’s not the point! All this… What *is* this!?”

“Don’t be a sour sport! The fairy told us, we’ve gotta defeat an evil witch. With our powers combined, we can beat her *easily*!”

“U-Umi-Chan! Don’t be so rash like that!”

Kayo was nervously trying to talk Umi out of this, but for Umi, this was the opportunity she was waiting for.

Finally, an adventure she can be a part of!

“H-How are you so calm about this, Umi-Chan?” asked Kayo.

“Cause I had a feeling”

“You had… a feeling?”

“Yeah, earlier this morning, I was like, ‘hm, this is gonna be an interesting day.’ Turns out, we become Magical Girls! That’s so *cool*!”

In the middle of their conversation, Toko swept in in front of the two girls. While floating in the air, the small fairy made a pose that was like someone begging for help.

“Oh, please, save me! I can give you powers, but I can’t fight off the witch! I need all of you guys’ help! Not just me! With your powers, you can protect and save the world, too!” said Toko while on her knees, and floating at the same time, hands clasped to each other.

Umi smiled proudly. With a thumbs up, she exclaimed,

“Nooo problem! Kayo and I will be on the case! We’d be happy to help you out!”

“H-Hey! I never agreed to that! Don’t drag me into this, Umi-Chan!”

“Someone needs our help and she just gave us the tools to do it, what’s not to understand, Kayo?” asked Umi in frustration.

“Sh-Shihabara, perhaps we should wait for a while.”

Another voice interrupted them. This time it was older. The voice originated from Ms. Himeno, who now looked like a ballerina dancer, clad with ribbons around her outfit.

So she'd been transformed as well.

"Well, you were chosen too, Teach. What do you expect us to do, say *no* after she gave us these powers? Let's get over the shock and actually answer the call to adventure for once!" exclaimed Umi.

Ms. Himeno shook her head.

"If this witch or whoever is really that dangerous. We can leave it to the police. I'm not going to let high school students, especially not ones under my watch, be subjected to doing something dangerous!"
Hearing Ms. Himeno's words, Toko flew up to her face. The small fairy had a pouty expression.

"What!? Are you kidding me? The police can't do anything about the witch! They'll be killed! As we speak, she's coming here right now! In fact, your kids have a better chance of surviving her than the police ever would!"

"I'm not going to endanger my students"

"If you don't stop her, they're going to be in danger, *anyway*!"

Ms. Himeno continued to shake her head.

"My word is final. My students are not going to fight some dangerous witch."

Hearing those words, Umi's eyes glared at her teacher with a mix of anger and shock. After taking a deep breath, she faced the whole room. She looked at each and every one of the students there, and began her speech.

"Listen. This cute fairy is asking us to help her in her time of need, and we'd just turn her *away*? We've been given powers! It's time we do something *good* with it! I don't care *what* anyone says…"

Umi glared at her teacher with a look of burning defiance.

"…but if you guys ain't gonna help, then it doesn't matter. I'm going in alone, no matter what *anyone* says!"

"Shihabara!" yelled Ms. Himeno.

"I'll also participate," said an elegant voice from across the room.

The girl in the wedding dress stood up. A lit candle stuck out of her head, yet she had the elegance of a princess with her.

She looked at a coin that someone must've dropped at the table in front of her.

Grabbing the coin, she began playing with it on her fingers as she smiled and looked towards everyone else.

"The fairy tells the truth, and whether or not anyone believes it, that witch will be coming for us, so there's no stopping the confrontation."

She flipped the coin, caught it with her hand, and deposited in a pocket.

"Also, I'd just gone through a tiresome exam earlier. I'm not looking forward to going back to normal," she finished as she smiled.

"Right on!" exclaimed Umi happily.

"I'll also join!"

Another voice, this time from a rainbow-colored girl, with a halo and a ring on her back.

"I-I may not know any of you, but I want to do some good! I'll also join up in defeating this witch! Ta-Chan, you'll come with me too, right?"

The rainbow girl looked at another girl. The other one with a mailman outfit. She simply sheepishly looked up, her answer as vague as it could be. No indication of anything.

"Mei will also join."

Another voice, this time from the ceiling.

Umi looked up, and saw a girl with an Arabian genie outfit, floating upside down on the ceiling.

"Mei is a Magical Girl. Mei will help other Magical Girls."

Umi had no idea who she was, but she was on Umi's side, so that could only mean it's a good thing.

“Alright, guys! That’s the spirit! Let’s all go and beat down this witch. 5 on 1? Not bad…” said Umi proudly.

“Wait! How are you guys so *casual* about this? We have nothing to go on, here!”

Kaori’s voice was practically begging to be heard. She was trying to appeal to everyone else’s sense of reasoning.

Ms. Himeno also stood up.

“All of you. You have no idea how dangerous this witch could be. I will not let some stranger drag you into this!”

Umi has had enough of Ms. Himeno’s constant complaints.

“We’ll be fine, Teach. Besides, you can’t stop us”

“Yes I can!”

“Why’s that, huh?”

“Because I’m your teacher, and what I say goes”

“That’s a lame reason, and I’m not going to listen to something like that when we’ve got a school to protect!”

“That’s *enough*, Shihabara!”

Slam!

Ms. Himeno had slammed on a desk, clearly angry at Umi’s outburst. However, after she slammed her fist down, Ms. Himeno herself was shocked at what happened as a result.

The table cracked in two, her strength obviously stronger than what she thought before.

Toko flew towards Ms. Himeno. Strangely, maybe because of the sunlight’s shade, Toko’s face looked more mature than before. Serious. Darker.

“You know, if you really wanted to get out, I won’t stop you. In fact, I could help you,” said the Fairy.

“Huh?”

“I can easily wipe your memory. Stop you from being a Magical Girl. After all, just losing 1 won’t be a problem. You’ll forget about all this. Your students, though, will still be Magical Girls, and this is still going to be real. Meaning if you really *really* wanted to protect your students…”

Ms. Himeno realized what Toko was going to say before Toko finished her sentence.

“…You’re going to want to stay a Magical Girl, and agree to let them fight alongside you. Help them. That’s the only way to protect them,” finished Toko with a smile.

The fairy then turned around to the students.

“Besides, it’s not just me that’ll be saved! Defeating an evil witch will save the whole world as well! You’ll all be doing your duty as Magical Girls! After all, Magical Girls before you have done the same, protect humans, and save the world!”

☆ **Tepsekemei**

Mei has become a Magical Girl.

Mei’s eyes were opened. Ever since she was born, nothing exciting has truly happened for her.

Until today.

Mei had forgotten what most days were like, but for the first time in her life, Mei had clarity in her mind. Her memories are as clear as day.

The winged human told her that there is a bad witch coming to the school. Thanks to her, Mei had been freed, and Mei had become a Magical Girl.

Therefore, Mei will repay that debt.

The feeling that freedom gives is amazing. For the first time in her life, if Mei wanted to go somewhere, she could just go somewhere.

Mei could move her limbs freely, Mei could move her fingers freely, and Mei could fly too.

Mei didn't think that humans could fly, but Magical Girls aren't really normal humans to begin with, so this was a blessing to Mei, floating in the air like this.

Mei folded her arms. Why? Because she can. Her eyes darted across the room. She knew these kids, but didn't remember any of their names. Mei's memories were always a blur to her.

"Hey… Mei, is it? Are you… bored? It's okay if you don't want to join us, you know?"

The rainbow-colored girl had tugged on Mei's shoulders, as she was currently upside-down at the moment.

Mei spun around right-side up.

What was this girl talking about? Mei wasn't bored. Mei couldn't be more excited. This was the most exciting thing that's ever happened to Mei since the day she was born.

So why did the rainbow girl think Mei was bored?

Oh…

It must be because of Mei's facial expressions. Mei had never really expressed any facial expressions before. She never needed to.

Other people seemed to talk by changing their expressions as well as the tone of their voice. It's subtle, but apparently, this is how they convey feelings.

Maybe the rainbow girl will understand that Mei's excited if she did the same.

Mei gave a wide grin, and what she perceived as a happy face.

"MEI ISN'T BORED, MEI IS VERY EXCITED," she said in a loud voice. After all, the tone of your voice matters too when conveying emotions, right?

It looks like the rainbow girl flinched. Her face was a mix of confusion and fear. She slowly backed away. Perhaps she mistook Mei's loudness for anger?

A quick solution is to display the fact that Mei is in fact happy. What better way to do that than by laughter?

"HAHAHAHAHAHAHA"

The rainbow girl smiled, but the smile didn't seem like an actual happy smile. It felt more like an embarrassed smile.

"S-Sorry for asking…" she said as she stepped back.

The nuances of this 'expression' thing is still new to Mei. She will have to understand and learn more about it before she can proceed in communication, it seems.

☆ **Captain Grace**

Umi was never able to do what she wanted to do.

Both her parents always warned her of the dangers of venturing out by yourself. But what's the point of life if you're just going to sit around doing nothing?

Safety is meaningless if it means being bored out of your life. A true adventurer will be safe regardless of what happens. Besides, what's life without a little danger?

Now, Umi is experiencing the same argument with Ms. Himeno.

Umi understood the social hierarchy of the school system. Students obey teachers because they're of a higher position than you, and for the most part, Umi had always done that…

…But now, Ms. Himeno is directly getting in the way of an actual adventure.

When you have to choose between following the social order and following your dreams that you've had since you were young, you'll obviously choose your dreams.

Umi would sacrifice anything to live out her dreams as an adventurer. She won't give in to a teacher, especially not after she's staring at her dream in the face.

Luckily for her, the Fairy, Toko, seems to have solved the solution. Now, Ms. Himeno will have to join them for this adventure, whether she wants to or not. Fine by Umi.

After everyone is in agreement, Toko motioned over towards the window. She pointed towards the parking lot. Normally full of cars, it was now quite empty.

"We're going to fight the evil witch over there!" said Toko.

“Wait, over there? Aren’t we supposed to keep our abilities a secret?” asked Umi in a puzzled voice.

“Don’t worry about it! As long as we finish up before the police or whoever show up, you guys should be fine!” reassured Toko.

The small fairy flew towards the front of the Science Lab, floating where the teacher would be.

While folding her arms, she spoke loudly,

“Now, the evil witch can track down Magical Girls, so we need a plan of attack! You all will disguise yourselves as normal and hide in several places around the parking lot. That way, you can surprise her!”

One by one, Toko had assigned hiding spots. Each Magical Girl hiding as normal, paired up with each other.

Umi and Kayo were hidden near some bushes, the 1st years were hiding in the shadow of a building, the wedding-dressed girl and Ms. Himeno were hiding behind a car, and the Arabian dressed girl was hiding under the sewers.

Toko positioned herself above the traffic light in the intersection leading up to the school.

All the girls were waiting anxiously.

The month was the end of October. The cold winds of Autumn were slowly transitioning into the Winter breeze, and normally, nobody would be willing to wait this long out in the cold.

Umi’s entire body felt the chill of the wind, but Umi didn’t care. Her thirst for adventure overcame any chill that she felt in the air.

It’s now been over 5 minutes. Anxiously awaiting this evil witch that Toko said would come.

At this point, the nervousness of Umi had caused her to sweat, despite the freezing temperature. She wanted to leap into action. If the witch didn’t come, they should come to her.

“She’s here.”

A voice from Umi’s phone, Toko’s voice, had sounded. Filtered through the static of the phone.

Umi’s heart jumped. Now is the time. She’s been waiting for this moment. She snuck a peek outside, and saw what seemed to be a car of some sort, pulling up in front of the traffic light.

Exiting the car was a hooded figure, wearing what seemed to be some sort of slippers. The figure had a coat on her, the hood hiding her facial features, and approached the traffic light.

The hooded girl looked up at the traffic light.

“Toko” she said, with a soft but threatening voice. The evil witch!

“O-hoo, you’ve come at last. Persistent,” answered Toko, full of confidence above the traffic lights.

“Surrender yourself now, or we’ll have to do it the hard way.”

The coat girl went straight to the point. She’s truly an evil witch…

“I don’t think so… *Now*!”

The signal.

All the girls rushed the coat girl, transformed into Magical Girls. Umi’s transformation was quick. Now, she was once again the pirate captain, Captain Grace!

☆ **Funny Trick**

Kayo was not confident about this at all. Nobody knew just what- or who- they were fighting.

Umi immediately transformed, so Kayo had to do it too. They were all rushing towards this girl, presumably this evil witch.

In Kayo's mind, she could see two problems with this.

The first one is, what if this witch isn't as bad as they thought? They know nothing about Toko or this person.

The second problem, if this witch really is bad, then how are they going to beat her? They still know *nothing* about her.

With over 6 Magical Girls rushing the coated girl from all directions, it seemed like there was no way the coated girl could escape.

However, the coated girl simply gasped from the initial shock, and dodged away.

The coat she used to hide herself flew off when she jumped away, and Kayo could finally get a good look at this mysterious girl.

Wearing what seems to be a white kimono, the girl had light blue hair, and bright red eyes. Long white stockings.

What's most interesting about her appearance, however, is the large bunny ears sticking out of her head, and large earmuffs where her ears would normally be.

The rabbit-eared girl took a moment to look at each of the 6 girls, but before Kayo knew it, the other girls had rushed to attack her once again.

"T-There's too many! It's a trap!" she yelled out towards the car.

From inside the car, a window rolled down, revealing a girl with a witch hat.

"Fall back! Get back in here, now!"

Kayo stood still, trying to process the situation. Obviously their enemies were also Magical Girls of some kind, but her inner doubt still nagged at her mind.

It didn't seem to affect the other girls though, as they still ran towards the rabbit-eared girl. No escape for her.

However…

The rainbow Magical Girl and the wedding dressed girl double-teamed the rabbit-eared girl.

Rainbow girl threw a punch, which was caught by rabbit-eared girl. The momentum was used to push the rainbow girl towards the wedding-dressed girl. They both tumbled to the ground.

Umi and Ms. Himeno then tried to attack. Ms. Himeno, with some flowing ribbons, attempted to tie up the rabbit-eared girl, but again, the rabbit-eared girl caught the ribbon, placed it on the ground, and stepped on it.

The sudden pull yanked Ms. Himeno off-balance. The rabbit girl continued to hold the ribbon. Twirled it around, and used it to tie up the Mailman Magical Girl.

The poor girl was one of the first years. It's obvious from her nervousness that she wasn't used to a fight.

Umi's turn this time.

Umi performed a roundhouse kick with her right leg that was blocked by the rabbit-eared girl. However, Umi smiled, and with her other leg, jumped and kicked her using her left leg this time.

Not expecting the sudden change in fighting ability, the rabbit girl was kicked away by Umi.

The Genie Magical Girl was floating in the sky, rushing to help Umi.

Umi ran as fast as she could towards the rabbit girl. The rabbit girl herself didn't lose any tempo, and rolled when she landed, transitioning smoothly to standing up again.

Now prepared for Umi, the rabbit girl was a different opponent than before.

As soon as Umi went in for the punch, the rabbit girl caught it and tried to use Umi's momentum to throw Umi off-balance.

Umi, used to fighting, managed to strengthen her stance after being pulled.

Umi's elbow was now poised to to attack the rabbit girl's stomach. Smiling once more, Umi wanted to curve her elbows to strike at the rabbit girl, but…

…The rabbit girl anticipated it, and used her leg to sweep Umi's legs, tripping her.

Umi reacted fast and rolled away, standing up, trying to rush the rabbit girl again.

The genie Magical Girl was now in full speed in the air, attempting to crash into the rabbit girl from behind her.

Umi ran towards the rabbit girl from the front, genie girl was divebombing her from the back.

Pincer attack.

Rabbit girl's ears twitched.

Rabbit girl reacted fast. She jumped towards Umi. Umi flinched at the sudden charge, and in that split second, the rabbit girl's jump transitioned to a jumping kick, aimed straight at Umi.

The rabbit girl kicked Umi away, and used the momentum to backflip away from Umi, jumping higher than the divebomb trajectory…

…and putting Umi right in the path of genie girl.

Genie girl couldn't stop her rush, and crashed into Umi as rabbit girl landed her backflip.

"Help! Help, please!"

A voice snapped Kayo out of the fight scene she saw. It was the mailman girl, and she was trapped underneath the ribbons.

They were all tied up around her now, and there was no way to get them off of her.

Kayo remembered her own Magical Skill.

Replace things that are hidden with something else.

She saw a trash can nearby, and ran over to it. Opening the can revealed some recycled bottles and soda.

She closed the trash can with a lid, and had an idea.

As if reacting to her thoughts, she noticed a piece of cloth sticking out of her gloves. Like a stage magician, she pulled it out to reveal a large white cloth, enough to hide a person.

She went over to the mailman girl.

“Sorry! Hold still, okay! Moving will make it worse”

She covered the girl in the cloth. Focused. Concentrated.

She then lifted the cloth away, and now, the ribbons that were once tying up the mailman girl were surrounding some bottles and soda cans.

The nearby trash can tripped over, and from inside, the mailman girl fell out.

“Gah! Guh…”

She was covered in whatever was inside that trash can.

Maybe that wasn’t the *best* switch in the world.

“S-Sorry!” said Kayo with an embarrassed smile.

Thump, Crash!

From behind her, she heard noises. Umi was getting beaten up and thrown around everytime she tried to attack the rabbit girl, but she *is* actually holding her own.

The rabbit girl screamed at the car.

“Meet me back at the meeting point! I’ll run away myself!”

Oh right. There was a car.

The girl in the car gritted her teeth.

“…Damn it. Okay. We’ll split up for now. Fall back!”

The car swerved and revved up, and began to drive in the opposite direction.

“Hey! Hey! Get that *car*!” shouted Toko towards the magical girls.

The rainbow girl ran over to the mailman girl.

“Ta-Chan! C’mon!” she said as she dragged the mailman girl up.

“Gah! K-Kaori, wai- WHOAAA”

Too late for mailman girl. Both of them were now running at full speed, trying to chase the car.

Meanwhile, Umi, wedding-dress girl, and genie girl were already prepared for round 2 with rabbit girl.

Ms. Himeno, however, was indecisive.

Kayo didn't want to participate. She never wanted to cooperate with Toko in the first place.

It's not that she didn't want to fight, or that she couldn't fight. However, she just had no idea of the *reasons* she was fighting for, and without that crucial information, she can't make a decision on what to do.

Toko and these two girls that are after her. They are both in conflict.

The question that needs to be answered is why…

The rabbit girl didn't even seem to want to kill the girls, in which case Kayo would happily join in to protect her friends.

Instead, Kayo watched, anticipating what to do next.

☆ **Rain Pou**

The car that drove off was fast. It was faster than any car should be. Could it be enhanced with magic?

Fortunately, since Kaori was a Magical Girl, she could easily keep up with the car. But it took a lot out of her, since she was pushing the limits of her stamina to do so.

Lagging behind her was Tatsuko, gasping for breath as she ran. Unlike Kaori, Tatsuko has always been less outgoing. Even with her inhuman speed, Tatsuko's finding it hard to keep up.

Kaori stopped and ran back to Tatsuko.

"Ta-Chan? Are you okay?"

“Hah… Hah… I’m okay…”

Kaori couldn’t bear to see her friend tired like this. She didn’t even think Tatsuko wanted to be a part of this.

“Ta-Chan. New plan, okay. We’ll trap them. You take that way, I’ll go this way. They’ll have nowhere to run,” said Kaori with a smile.

Tatsuko looked up and nodded.

The two split up, and Kaori jumped. She jumped high enough to reach the taller skyscrapers, and skipped and hopped across the buildings.

She caught wind of the car.

The car was also defying the laws of physics. It didn’t slow down when turning, it didn’t show any signs of stopping.

That shouldn’t be physically possible, but Kaori can’t question it. Not now.

She continued to leap across the buildings, tracking down the car as it swerves and moves alongside the busy city streets.

Finally, an intersection she can jump down to.

She dropped down to street level, and… encountered a middle-aged woman and a little boy, staring at awe at Kaori.

Considering her suit and the fact that she just jumped down a skyscraper, Kaori wasn’t sure how to react.

“Ehehe… Happy Halloween!” said Kaori with a smile.

The middle-aged woman nodded, “Ah… It’s October…”

Kaori immediately ran when they weren’t looking. She had to follow the car. She couldn’t lose it now.

She turned across an intersection and was face-to-face with the speeding car. Finally, the car was headed towards Kaori. She can stop it. She had the speed, and the strength.

The car’s window opened, and a hand threw pebbles and gravel towards her.

Kaori was at her guard, but had no idea what they were.

The pebbles then began to explode into bright light. Flashing bright that Kaori couldn’t help but be blinded and stunned.

She braced herself and shielded her eyes, but by the time she opened them again, the car was already gone.

☆ **Captain Grace**

This rabbit-eared girl is tough.

The others, they’re not used to fighting. They’re not used to school brawls or athletic events. They’re not used to putting their well-being at line.

But Umi was. Umi was used to that, and Umi won’t lose to any opponent, no matter how strong they think they are.

But this rabbit girl is something else.

Even with 3 Magical Girls attacking from all directions at once, she gracefully danced through them, dodging and blocking every attack made.

Then, with one fell swoop, she easily pushed them away.

Umi wasn’t going to let her get away so easily, though.

Now was the time to be serious.

Umi unsheathed her cutlass. A powerful sharp sword. Twirling it for a bit, she then began to pose in a swordsman’s stance.

The rabbit-eared girl perked up, and prepared to engage her.

Umi made the first move, striking with a slash, but the rabbit-eared girl simply dodged it. Umi moved fast, slashing and stabbing, but the rabbit-eared girl was too fast. Her guard was up, and Umi couldn’t break through.

They were locked in combat, Umi just needed one opening. One opening to strike.

Umi trusted her instincts, thrusting and slashing until she saw her chance. At last, when the rabbit girl is positioned in a more awkward vertical position, Umi immediately slashed horizontally, believing she could not possibly dodged this.

Unfortunately for her, the rabbit girl sensed it, and with her speed, dropped to all fours.

It was then that the rabbit girl quickly turned around and kicked Umi away with her legs.

Umi lost her balance, and saw the rabbit girl run away. But she wasn't running on two legs, she was running away on all 4. Dashing away like an actual rabbit.

Umi gave chase.

The rabbit girl was fast. She used her four-legged running speed to climb and bounce and run across the city, attempting to shake off Umi.

Umi did the best she could to follow her, and was gaining on the rabbit girl.

Just…

…A few…

…More…

Umi stretched her hands, about to grab a cloth of the rabbit girl's Kimono,, when she felt a sharp pain in her thigh.

Umi tripped over, tumbling and rolling as she did. Her thigh was in pain, and when she saw it, it had blood.

The rabbit girl hadn't kicked her. Was there someone hidden? Who?

Either way, the rabbit girl had ran off somewhere, and Umi had missed her chance.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 23 Hours, 50 Minutes)**

Mine Musubiya had always looked at things from an objective perspective. Her family and her parents had taught her this way of life.

Calculate something from how much you gain vs. how much you lose.

She had lived life this way, and it has served her well.

Favors, kindness, all will be repaid with favors and kindness. Help your friends, and they'll help you. However, if there was a way to get a one-up, don't hesitate to take it.

Using this way of life, she has managed to become Class Representative.

The current situation is unique.

Mine had become a Magical Girl. The gains far outweigh any losses involved.

Even though they had lost the battle, they had learned how to use their powers and abilities. A net gain, not a loss.

The loss, however, was that the enemy now knows about them. They will be prepared next time.

Mine's Magical Skill was not combat-oriented. It is a Promise-based power.

Her Magical Skill:

To enforce any promises kept.

How that works, she's not quite sure just yet. However, it could be useful should the time come to pass.

"Argh, we lost 'em… We gotta try harder, you guys!" cried Toko once all the girls have returned.

"*Some* of us weren't helping in the fight," said the pirate girl, staring at the stage magician.

"Wha… I *was*! I just didn't want to fight because I don't know anything about them, okay?" retaliated the stage magician.

"What's not to know? They're bad. We're good."

“U-Umi-Chan, what proof do you have?”

“They *tried* to capture Toko, or else they’d beat her up!”

“That *barely* counts!”

“Oh, so now the bullies are the good guys?”

They were arguing. There was tension.

“Okay, guys! Enough! We’ll have to think of a new plan! Next time they come won’t be easy, so let’s prepare ourselves, okay?” exclaimed Toko

The rainbow girl nodded. The mailman girl also nodded, more reluctantly.

“Mei has failed you. Mei will try harder,” said the genie girl in the air.

“Alright, I’m in, what about you, Teach?” asked the pirate girl.

“We… don’t really have a choice, do we?”

Ms. Himeno, in a dress filled with ribbons, also nodded reluctantly.

“Alright, what about you, Ms. Class Rep? You in?”

The pirate girl now faced Mine.

No, not Mine. Her name is Wedin. She had fully embraced her role as a Magical Girl.

“I’m not the Class Representative.”

“Huh? Sure you are. Rep Musubiya, right?”

“No. That is who I was. Now, I am the Magical Girl known as Wedin. If I recall correctly, you are Captain Grace, correct? It’s nice to meet you”

“Aaah, right, we gotta start adopting our codenames, guys! Well then, Captain Grace, ready for duty! What about you, *Funny Trick*?”

The stage magician breathed a deep sigh.

“For now… I don’t have a choice. I’m in… for now,” she said with a face that looked as if she’s conflicted about her choice.

The day had started normally, but now… Now they were Magical Girls.

Chapter 2:
Drowning in Love and Hearts

☆ **7753**

A baseball player takes time after a big game to stop a crime happening just a few blocks away.

A gunfight ends with all the shooters incapacitated, and one hero standing in all the chaos.

A terrorist cell stopped immediately, no casualties, just sightings of someone flying away.

These are all stories of Magical Girls. Magical Girls who pursue the ideals of justice and heroism. Unfortunately, not every Magical Girl is like this.

It’s far too easy to find Magical Girls that pursue their own pride or do good things for selfish reasons. After all, they’re people too. Most of the truly heroic ones are ones you only find in fiction.

Kotori Nanaya is the Magical Girl 7753, pronounced “Nanako-San”.

Clad in a black buttoned-up dress, a hat, and hair that’s braided to make a gigantic heart shape. She had heart tattoos in the back of her palms, and a small one underneath her left eye.

She definitely looks the part of a Magical Girl.

She has had 7 years of experience as a Magical Girl, but that didn’t exactly mean much, considering she doesn’t see much action in the field.

Right now, she’s in the middle of her training drills.

A large field, filled with boulders and rocks positioned in different places, some further than others. 7753 made quick work of them, being timed as to see how she reaches each and every boulder, destroying them with precision strikes each time.

7753's Magical Skill is her goggles that she wears.

'*The ability to gather information*'.

Her goggles can find any information about a target. Just like an RPG status screen.

Their name, age, power, eye color, pinching strength.

It could be as specific or broad as needed. 7753 need only adjust her goggles to do so. They are quantified using a 5-point system.

However, it's also possible to find unquantifiable information.

Hobbies, likes, dislikes, dreams, friends.

Thanks to her skills, 7753 had been assigned as an information gatherer. She's also part of the team that finds possible rogue Magical Girls, as nothing can hide from her goggles.

7753 works in the Human Resources Division of the Land of Magic. She's also in charge of recruitment. At least, narrowing down possible candidates for Magical Girls.

First, she'd try to find their strengths, their beliefs, anything to convince her that they're fit to become a hero of justice.

They could come from anywhere.

A boxing player, a writer, a train conductor, a manga artist, a jobless homeless person.

It also has good pay, which is what 7753 needs right now.

Her parents had passed away a couple of years ago, and she lives by herself, with only some relatives to talk to. Family issues have been turbulent ever since her parents passed.

Work and money is what keeps 7753's human life going at the moment, and being the Land of Magic's information gatherer was pretty much good job security.

But life as a recruiter and an information gatherer is rather… boring. 7 years, and none of it was fieldwork.

7753 wanted to do something for the world. She had trained so hard because the world might be in crisis. However, all of her previous mentors had always said the same thing.

“It’s not your time yet”

“The world isn’t going to end tomorrow”

“Worry about protecting the city before protecting the planet”

Thanks to her constant attitude, the Land of Magic often had to switch her to different mentors.

Her new mentor right now seems like a dependable person. She feels different than the previous mentors.

The first time 7753 met her, she could feel an air of grace and royalty. However, when she spoke, it was with a calm, down-to-earth voice.

After a few months, her mentor noticed 7753’s reluctance in training and writing reports.

“S-Sorry, Master. You can tell huh? Yeah, it’s… not gonna lie, boring work,” admitted 7753.

Her mentor only nodded slowly, and asked if she could borrow 7753’s goggles for a day.

The next day after that, her mentor had returned her goggles. New and improved, somehow.

“Now you can instantly transmit information. They also have tons of more useful features as well,” said her mentor calmly.

“Wha-Huh? How!? These things are one of a kind. How’d you-”

“I didn’t. A close friend of mine did.”

Since then, 7753’s bond with her mentor had grown.

But now it's been a year, and she's still doing the same thing over and over. No change. Nothing.

7753 felt like having the talk again. This is the talk that usually makes or breaks a mentor. Most of them would find her too rebellious, or unable to be handled. Her new mentor is different, though, so maybe it'll turn out differently.

With a deep breath, heart beating, she strode over to her mentor, on her training field, with crumbled and destroyed boulders in the back.

"You've gotten faster. Good job," said her mentor.

"Thanks… Um… Master, I wanted to ask you something," said 7753, with a nervous look in her eyes.

"Hm?"

"I want to work in the field."

"Hm… Interesting request, 7753"

"P-Please, just give me a chance. I've been working here 7 years. I know how to defend myself. I just- Maybe you could pull some strings, y'know, it's- it's just…"

7753 was beginning to lose her words. She'd been through this routine with her other mentors. Finding the right reasons.

She paused. Took a deep breath, and with a determined look on her face, she said,

"I just want to do some good in the world."

"You're not satisfied with your position now?"

"I-I wanna be someone that helps people directly, someone that saves their lives… I wanna be like Snow White!"

"The Magical Girl Hunter? Fairly dangerous job description."

"Okay, maybe not *that* high up, but look. She's stopped terrorists, she's saved people, she's a hero."

"Fieldwork is dangerous work, 7753."

“I know that… I just… Give me a chance.”

Her mentor smiled.

It’s been a few days after they had the talk. Kotori was having a business trip in B-City. It’s a smaller, yet still pretty crowded city. Unlike the large metropolitan N-City.

The business trip had to do with Magical Girl business. A probation period for another Magical Girl.

The hotel that Kotori stayed in was quite spacious, even though she wished it could be a bit bigger.

Waking up, she washed her face. She hadn’t been taking good care of her human body mostly. Her hair is constantly messy, and after a morning shower, only then she realized just how her human self looked.

For most of her time, she had stayed as a Magical Girl. It’s more practical that way. She only ever needed to change back to human if she needed to.

She drank coffee while watching the news. Several clips of high school students were shown, reminding Kotori of her own youth.

She’s an adult now, but as a Magical Girl, she certainly looked young enough to be a high schooler. Sometimes she wished she was still that young.

Kotori decided it was time to take care of her human appearance.

She opened up a map on her phone, found the nearest salon, and called them up, looking to make an appointment. Next, a nice morning walk would get her human muscles up and running again.

She needed to stay fit in both forms after all!

The nearest park would do.

A quick stroll later, and she was interrupted by a phone call. The words on the screen were clear. It was her mentor.

She doesn't usually call. She mostly uses texts.

Regardless, Kotori picked up the phone.

"Hello, this is 7753"

"Good. I've got an announcement, and it's fairly important."

"What is it, Master?"

"You're being assigned to an investigation team"

The words had reached her ears, but she still couldn't process it. Reassignment. Investigation. Team.

"Wait… sorry, slow down, come again?"

"An Investigation Team. There's been an incident in B-City. They're asking for you to help out. In the field"

"I… whoa, wait… huh?"

"You wanted this, right? There is time to decline if you wish. You have until the end of the day. I'll send you an e-mail with further details."

"Whoa, Master, wait, wait… could you… elaborate?"

"I'm not going to lie. This job is dangerous, but that's fieldwork. Recently, a Magical Girl assassin has been sighted in B-City. There's been an assassination."

"What? An assassination? Here? Now?"

"Yes. This job… I can't guarantee your safety. If you accept, you should know that there is a possibility of dying. However, your team is there to help you."

Death? 7753 could die?

"W-Who am I dealing with, here?"

"From what I understand, they're tracking down a dangerous assassin, expected it to only be one, but they encountered resistance. Lots of resistance. The rest of the details are in the e-mail I'll send you. Read them over, and make your decision."

Kotori gulped.

“O-Okay… Thanks, Master.”

“One more thing, 7753. At the end of the day, there will be a barrier erected around the city. It’s invisible to those without Magical Skills, and won’t affect them, but this will essentially be a quarantine.”

“Huh?”

“If you choose to stay… you can’t escape. Good luck, and stay safe.”
Kotori’s heart skipped a beat.

It’s been a few hours since the call. Now at the park, Kotori took a look at the e-mail she was sent.

The target is an assassin. Identity unknown. Last seen within the boundaries of the city. The victim is a high ranking Land of Magic official.

While their identity is currently unknown, it is known that the wounds they inflicted were lacerations and cuts. Possible weapons are bladed. E.G: Swords, Knives, Machetes, etc.

Collaborators include a Fairy named Toko. In possession of the latest model of Magical Phones. Tracking systems have been placed on prototypes in order to best know where she is at all times. Both were last seen in B-City.

Heading the Investigation team is Lead Examiner Mana of the Examination Division, Hana Gekokujo, a specialist in tracking individuals, and Mao Pam, of the Foreign Affairs Division.

So far it looks like things are in order. But bladed weapons, swords. The thought scared Kotori.

But this is what she asked for. She can't back down, not now. Not after she'd wanted to do this for so long.

It's either she does this now, or it's back to 7 years of non-fulfilling work.
Kotori had made her choice.

On her way home, she passed through an intersection in traffic. That's where she saw it. The barrier surrounding the city.

People were passing through it normally, but Kotori could see it. She wondered…

…Quarantine.

Somewhere within the city, there were dangerous Magical Girls on the loose. She'd passed the point of no return.

Kotori walked slowly towards the barrier. Slowly, she stretched her hand out. With her finger, she gently placed it towards the barrier, and…

A sudden numbness struck her neck and spine. Like lightning jolting through. Her vision became blurry. Her ears felt like it popped. She heard nothing.

Her legs felt wobbly, and every part of her body felt pain.

She wanted to scream, but there was no voice.

She began coughing blood. Her legs too wobbly to support her. She fell down the street, and tried to stand up. She doesn't have the energy to do so, and began crawling instead.

Every other bystander was shocked. Someone then tried to help her, supporting her on their back.

Weakly, as Kotori's vision began to blur, she pointed to a general direction away from the barrier. The person carrying her nodded, as they rushed to that direction.

Slowly, Kotori began to regain her senses. Supporting herself on a nearby building.

She felt like death. It seems the barrier was effective at its job. Kotori was truly trapped within this city.

No choice. Time to move forward.

The meeting place was in a karaoke bar. A private room for a group.

7753 nervously looked around for the right room. Her palms were sweaty with nervousness. This is her first time on the field.

Here goes nothing.

Knock Knock.

She heard a voice from behind the door.

“Come in, please”

She opened the door, and saw 4 Magical Girls staring straight at her. Bad for her nervousness. Her body felt heavy.

4 Magical Girls.

…Wait, 4?

中から暖かな空気が漏れ出
魔法少女が四人いた。
――四人？
混乱した。なぜか資料より一人多い。どういうことだろうか。全員すでに変身している。

A Magical Girl with the white coat and glasses. She looks the leader-type certainly.

Sitting next to her was a rabbit-eared girl, smiling happily.

Across them was a Magical Girl clad in a black coat, and silver hair. Horns protruding out of her head.

And the last one.

A ninja Magical Girl. On her left eye was a scar. Some kind of bladed wound. And her left arm was… missing.

One-handed.

Instinctively, 7753 looked away.

The girl with the glasses had an angry look upon seeing 7753.

She spoke out loud,

“This is an investigation mission and we’re getting all these other people”

The rabbit-eared girl patted the glasses girl’s shoulders.

“Mana, calm down. We’ll need all the help we can get! Let’s give them a chance!”

The girl with glasses merely rolled her eyes.

Rabbit ears stood up, walked over towards 7753, and bowed down, smiling.

“My name is Hana Gekokujo. Call me Hana!”

7753 was startled. Her reaction was to also bow, lower than her partner.

“I-I’m 7753! It’s an honor to be working with you!!!”

“Haha, oh don’t worry. We’re all friends here. Over there in the white coat is Mana. The one in the black coat is Mao Pam.”

Mao Pam. In Japanese, Mao translates literally to the Devil. Her horns certainly do match. But her eyes and smile are as gentle as ever.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, 7753,” said Pam with a smile.

It seems 7753 was expecting some sort of demonic style Magical Girl, but perhaps names aren’t everything.

Hana continued, pointing towards the ninja in the back.

“Finally, that’s Ripple. She’s volunteered for the job as well.”

Ripple nodded her head.

Ripple… Ripple?

The name sounds familiar. Certainly 7753 has heard of her before, which means she must’ve filed a report on her once.

With 7 years of work reporting, it’s actually quite hard to remember when she heard of this girl, though. For now, she shouldn’t think hard about that.

Mana stood up.

“Well, now that the introductions are over, time to get to business.”

She pulled out what seemed to be a wand and witch hat, and placed them on the table.

“I’ll give a quick briefing,” she said as she looked at all present.

Hana took a spot next to Mana, and sat down.

7753 awkwardly stood there, with almost nowhere to sit since the seats seemed to be full. It was then that Ripple scooted over, offering 7753 a seat next to her.

Quickly, she shuffled towards the empty seat and sat down, silently thanking Ripple with a nod.

Now she felt bad for looking away earlier.

“Firstly, it seems that the Foreign Affairs department decided to quarantine us here, as I’m sure you’re *all* aware of.”

Mana gave an accusatory look towards Pam.

Pam simply shrugged and replied,

“There is a dangerous, potentially lethal assassin hiding out in the city. A quarantine is necessary.”

Mana sighed, and spoke, “How much time until the quarantine lifts?”

Pam checked her watch.

“We have roughly a day. Then the barrier unlocks. Should be enough time to find them,” she said.

Mana nodded, then began her speech,

“What we have are several Magical Girls protecting an escaped criminal. Illegal use of magic powers, as well as assault on a Land of Magic official. The sentence is to capture them, but if they threaten you, lethal force is granted.”

She folded her arms,

“Any questions?”

The room fell silent for a few moments. The dim light from the TV of the Karaoke room shone on the wall. On the screen was a famous idol group performing a song. The juxtaposition was awkward.

Ripple then raised her hand.

Mana grumbled in a low voice. It seemed like she didn’t want to be asked any more questions, even if she asked for some.

“What is it?” she asked.

“Do you know what she looks like?” said Ripple in a calm voice.

Mana looked over towards Hana.

“For now, the assassin herself is of unknown identity. We know she came here because of her mascot, Toko. We don’t know which one she is, we do know she has allies. They were dressed as a pirate, a stage magician, a genie, some rainbow colored suit, a pink ballerina, and a mailman. Any one of those could be our target.”

That's a lot. How did whoever they're chasing manage to get a lot of reinforcements in such a short amount of time.

"Sounds like an improbable amount of reinforcements, in such a short amount of time." said Ripple, echoing 7753's thoughts.

"Exactly. All of them will be sentenced the same."

"Why is that?" asked Ripple once more.

"I just explained their crimes."

"You're sure of that?" asked Ripple again. Her voice ever so calm.

Mana glared at Ripple.

"Are you sympathizing with them, Ripple?" accused Mana.

"No. I'm giving the benefit of the doubt. We know nothing about them."

"We know *enough*. They willingly helped the assassin. They certainly weren't forced, and they voluntarily attacked and chased us. That makes them guilty of the crime."

"Hardly. You're being too emotional with this one. Assume they're innocent."

"Assume they're *innocent*? I just told you what they did."

"Think about the situation. The assassin all of a sudden has new Magical Girls pop out of nowhere. Which is more probably, that these girls were under her employment the whole time, or that they have no clue what's going on?"

Mana slammed the table.

"Listen, smartass. This girl is a highly dangerous assassin. Did you forget that she killed a Land of Magic official? In cold blood as well. We are *far* beyond sympathy. Now, you volunteered to lend us your fighting ability, not your hypotheticals. I'm leading this team, so I'd appreciate it if you would shut the hell up and focus on the mission. Do I make myself clear?"

There was a silence. The dim light of the television set illuminated the room. The song of a popular idol group was playing on the TV. Despite the cheerful background music, it was eerily awkward.

Ripple closed her eyes and nodded,

“Understood.”

Thank god, that could’ve turned ugly.

Mana took a deep breath and backed off.

“Good. Well, that’s the briefing.”

“Whenever possible, stay in your Magical Girl forms. In case we’re ambushed. Use coats or thick clothing to hide any non-human looking parts. It’s near winter, so it shouldn’t look out of place,” added Mana.

She walked out of the karaoke room. The rest stood up.

Ripple mumbled in a low voice,

“This is not going to end well…”

Upon closer inspection of Ripple’s wounds, it would appear that they’re not by design. Certainly, a Magical Girl could have a scarface looking design. A scarred ninja could be considered cool in some circles.

However, Ripple’s scar was way too real to be a part of her outfit. Which means that arm that she lost was from a past incident as well.

What happened to her?

Ripple shrugged and glanced at 7753.

“Wonderful way to start my probation, I guess…” said Ripple.

Oh. That’s why she was familiar.

7753’s job was to figure out who was fit to become Magical Girls. She also had the job of scouter of the Human Resources Division.

One of the Magical Girls that were scheduled to be on probation period today was Ripple. Before Ripple could enter as an official Land of Magic representative, she had to undergo a probation period.

7753's business trip to B-City was to oversee that probation period as well, at least that was her original plan.

7753 began putting on her goggles. She started seeing all of Ripple's stats.
Age, Height, Weight, Interests. Probation Period, scheduled for today.

7753 had felt bad for Ripple, so she tapped Ripple's shoulder, hoping to start a conversation.

"Hey. Ripple, right? It's nice to meet you. I'm your examination officer. So, this is kind of a weird setup, but I'm sure it'll work out well. Examinations in your home turf often do! Let's just treat this mission as the probation alright? I gotta say, you live pretty far in B-City. Had to take the train to get here."

Ripple raised one of her eyebrows, in a questioning look.

"Wait… you don't live here?" asked Ripple.

"Ah, no, I don't. Don't *you* live here, Ripple?"

"No. I live in N-City, not B-City."

"Eh?"

That's a far off place. Why did Ripple come here? Did she really do it to volunteer? Why would her probation test be held in B-City if it wasn't?

7753 had assumed that Ripple happened to be in the area, but that's unlikely if the cities are as far apart as B-City and N-City.

7753's Magical Phone rang. On the caller ID was simply displayed. 'Boss'. It was her mentor.

"Ah, Ripple. Go on ahead, I'll catch up in a bit! I have to take this call."
Ripple nodded, and left the room. Pam, Hana, and Mana are gone as well.
7753 pressed the Answer button,

"Yes, this is 7753."

“Seems you’ve linked up with the others. Good job.”

Involuntarily, 7753 looked around. She was confused. How had her mentor known where she was or what happened. Did she have some way of seeing her? Was she here with her?

“Don’t be so surprised, 7753. I’m not nearby. Your goggles transmit any information you have, remember. That’s how I know you’ve grouped up,” explained her mentor calmly.

“Ah, okay, that makes sense…”

“Don’t worry. I won’t be able to monitor you if you remove your goggles. In a way, you control your own privacy. Nice meeting place, by the way. Karaoke place. Never would’ve thought of that.”

Again, 7753 felt a chill every time her mentor mentioned something accurate. It was as if her mentor was here with her, even though she’s not physically here.

“Um, Master… isn’t it a bit… intrusive?”

“You’re one to talk. You haven’t exactly told your allies about your powers. Finding out all their secrets, likes, dislikes. That’s also quite intrusive. I’m merely seeing through your eyes.”

“Well… Um…”

“It’s fine, 7753. I’m not here to talk about ethics. I’m here to discuss something else.”

As 7753 exited towards the parking lot. Her path was blocked by Mana. Not realizing what was going on, she merely stopped.

Then she noticed that behind her, Hana, with a green coat, rabbit ears tucked inside, also flanked her back.

Mana’s eyebrows were furrowed, angry.

“Ripple, Pam. We’re going to have a personal talk with 7753 right now. Leave us be.”

Ripple shook her head,

“This is really not the time or place-”

“You’re right. This isn’t. Which begs the question. Just what exactly were you talking about with your boss, 7753?” asked Mana.

7753 was surprised. It seemed that Mana may have overheard her talking on the phone with her mentor. How?

As a sign of innocence, 7753 raised both her hands up.

Mana walked up in front of 7753. Face to face. Centimeters away. She was actually far more threatening up close.

“Just who the hell are you supposed to be? We were never supposed to get assistance, and now we’re getting offers from every single Division. Now *you* show up and we find out you’re *spying* on us?” said Mana in a low, threatening voice.

7753’s forehead began sweating. She had no idea just what she was supposed to say. Her heartrate increased, and she felt hot under the pressure.

“Listen, I’m not spying on you. I don’t know why you think that. I was assigned here,” explained 7753.

“Bullshit,” exclaimed Mana as she grabbed 7753 by the collar, raising her up and pushing her towards a wall.

Then, Mana pointed towards her goggles.

“Don’t play dumb. You thought you could disguise your talks with your boss, but you’re sending information to her.”

“No! No I’m not. That’s my Magical Skill! It doesn’t work if I don’t wear it in my eyes. I-If you heard my conversation, surely you heard that part! B-Besides. With my powers, we can easily find the assassin. It doesn’t matter if she’s in human form. My goggles will tell me if she’s a Magical Girl.”

Mana remained silent, still grabbing 7753 by the collar.

“What do you know? Tell me the truth.”

Gulp.

“I-I know you’re an Investigation Team. You’re sent to find an assassin or a killer or someone. I know that your intel says she’s hiding here. Anything other than that, I’ve heard from your briefing.”

Silence. Mana still grabbing 7753’s collar. Her eyes were hard to read. She was gritting her teeth, and veins were still popping out of her forehead.
7753 then spoke once more,

“I-I know there’s a barrier stretched alongside B-City. We’re in a quarantine, right?”

“Yes… yes we are. What about it?”

“W-Well. It doesn’t just trap the killer. It traps the mascot, it traps us, it traps anyone with magical powers, right? It seems pretty drastic… Also, it probably costs a lot of magic, so… something like that isn’t prepared so suddenly.”
Mana began to loosen the grip.

“What are you implying?”

“I don’t… I don’t think you wanted the barrier. I think you and Hana personally wanted to lead the mission alone, but when you requested for help, you got more than you bargained for…”

“The barrier is necessary.”

A voice, not Mana’s. It was Pam’s. Mao Pam spoke, folding her arms.

“My Division received reports of a dangerous and lethal Magical Girl on the loose. We’ve prepared the barrier for a while now. Once we pinpointed her location, we had the barrier set up immediately. Believe me when I say that the benefits outweigh the costs. Now the assassin is trapped with *us*.”

7753 tried to speak up,

“But that’s not what I’m doing. I honestly just want to help out. I was assigned here, no questions asked.”

Mana released 7753. She dropped and staggered backwards. Mana shook her head and glared at both 7753 and Pam.

“Enough. You two think you’re so different but you’re the same. Foreign Affairs, Human Resources, all these Divisions… You all and your petty political infighting. You’re both trying to win influence from the higher ups to support your own division. It’s stupid. It’s petty.”

Her glare stung deep in 7753. Although 7753 herself didn’t believe she wanted to do all those things that Mana mentioned, she knew that the Divisions had always had internal fighting.

They had always strived to become the more important ones. Like factions in a war, the more influence they have, the more they can affect the Land of Magic’s decisions.

Mana turned her back on the both of them, Hana walking besides her.

“I don’t care about your politics. I’m here to catch a murderer. I’m trying to save lives.” 7753 breathed a sigh of relief. Oxygen flowed towards her again.

Mana stopped in her tracks, and glared at 7753.

“You still haven’t answered my question. Who are you. Why did you come to B-City in the first place?”

7753 pointed towards Ripple.

“Her. She’s under my watch,” replied 7753.

Mana raised her eyebrows.

“Ripple? Well. I’m not sure if you HR people are told about current events, but… do you know who Ripple really is?” asked Mana.

A silence. 7753 honestly didn’t know, as she didn’t have time to look over Ripple’s full data.

“I’ll tell you. She’s a *Children of Clamberry*. Survived her tests. Last-minute too. Rumor has it that she suffered wounds that should’ve killed her. If there’s one thing you can count on her for, it’s fighting, despite her… handicaps. You trust her?” asked Mana.

7753 glanced over at Ripple.

Ripple was expressionless. Her face devoid of any readable emotion.

7753 nodded.

“Ripple is my responsibility. For now, she’s officially under my watch. I’ll be her probation officer.”

“And what if she snaps? You don’t have combat experience to take her down, do you?” threatened Mana.

7753 backed away. She straightened her back. Took a deep breath, and lowered her tone of voice a few octaves.

“I think that’s a possibility with all the participants here. Mao Pam herself is a powerful Magical Girl too, no?”

7753 didn’t move. Her stare was intense, focusing on Mana’s eyes. She mustn’t lose to this intimidation battle. Can’t show any type of weakness at all. This way, the investigation can continue.

Luckily, Pam responded,

“That’s true. I could be considered a liability. Rest assured, I won’t use my full power until we find our assassin. As for any of our own turning against us. Rest assured that I’m prepared for that as well.”

Mana looked at both of them. Grumbling, she closed her eyes, turned around, and finally continued walking.

7753 sighed. Silently, she thanked her mentor. Her mentor had been providing instructions through her goggles on how to act to escape Mana’s scrutiny.

‘*Tell her you’re here for Ripple’*

‘Walk backwards a few steps’

‘Lower your tone, then mention Mao Pam. She’s practically more dangerous than Ripple.’

If it weren’t for her mentor, she probably would have no idea what to say. Fortunately, nobody else knew that her goggles did have a communication function.

For now, their problems are far worse than just infighting, and 7753 would do good to keep an eye on her own team as well as the assassin.

But 7753 also wasn't lying. Ripple was her duty. 7753 was sent here to supervise a probation. This way she can kill two birds with one stone. She just hoped that the actual process will go smoothly.

☆ **Ripple (Remaining Time: 22 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

The Magical Girls surrounding Ripple right now come from the Land of Magic. Unlike normal Magical Girls, these were high ranking officials, assigned the dangerous tasks and assignments that are too much for the regular Magical Girls to handle.

If Ripple wanted to join their ranks, she'd have to fulfill one condition.

A probation period, supervised by the head examiner 7753. In accordance with Ripple's participation in Clamberry's tests, the Land of Magic doesn't trust any Magical Girls that come out of it.

For 2 years, Ripple had been working to root out any rogue Magical Girls, and generally keep the world safe. Unfortunately, she lacks any detailed intel, and to get more, she'd have to join the Land of Magic.

She hated the Land of Magic. Their bureaucracy and internal politics didn't interest her, and in fact made her hate them more.

But she wasn't looking to overthrow them or anything. If she wanted to change the system, she'd have to change it from the inside.

Ripple had a friend, or at least the only one she could call a close friend now. She was already inside the Land of Magic. Now she was protecting the world. She was out there doing some good.

But she also changed. Ripple remembered her when she was a naïve carefree child. Now, she was ruthless and aggressive. The only thing that gave Ripple a peace of mind was that she hasn't crossed any lines, and is still good deep down.

To follow in her footsteps, and maybe even work with her together again. That would be a dream come true.

Ripple also had a legacy to live on. Mana, the group leader, although having a different personality, reminded her of her old partner. It was probably due to her witch-like outfit.

Her old partner…

She had made a promise to herself to continue on in her memory.

All of the fighting, the turmoil, none of that matters. Since her partner's death, Ripple had been trying to expand her boundaries.

She'd be proud of that. Ripple believed so.

She'd scheduled for an application for probation, and it's only after half a year that it was accepted.

Ripple received her probation officer's name, 7753. Then, she received an e-mail to head to B-City for her training period.

For some strange reason, they set the meeting place at a Karaoke place. Ripple's not the one to complain. Their choice, not hers. But then, more weird things happened. Only a few hours after arriving in B-City, Ripple found out she was trapped.

The barrier. It had appeared.

After learning more details, that Ripple had been assigned to an Investigation squad as a volunteer to capture an assassin, Ripple again began to hate the Land of Magic.

Using Magical Girls to fulfill their own goals. That was what most of them were like. Change was necessary within the system.

Trapped in a city with nowhere to run, forced to fight an enemy that could kill her.

Déjà vu.

But if she was going to fight, she damn well will fight. She's had plenty of experience fighting before, and she'll use that to her full potential.

In the karaoke place, she met up with 7753 face-to-face. However, she was quite surprised when she found out how non-assertive 7753 was, and the fact that the leader was someone from the Examination Department, not Human Resources, as Ripple was led to believe.

7753's confusion struck her as strange as well. What's even stranger is the fact that none of them originated from B-City, and 7753 had assumed Ripple lived in B-City as well.

Why bring the officer and trainee to a place none of them lived in?

Questions, questions. Questions that will have to wait. For now, Ripple followed 7753's lead.

And it's not like 7753 was the only anomaly as well. Earlier at the karaoke place, there was a similar discovery made by Ripple.

Before 7753's arrival at the karaoke bar, Ripple had talked to Mao Pam

"Ripple, do you have a minute?" said Pam, who was sitting in the sofa nearby.

"What is it?"

"I want to talk to you about something. Let's head outside for a moment."

"Okay…?"

The two walked out, out of earshot of the others.

"These people. Our team. Do you know them?"

The answer was honestly no. How would Ripple know them? They're high ranking Land of Magic officials. Although, Ripple expected Pam to know them.

Mana seemed to be the type to want her own way. In a way, she was like Ripple herself back in the day, if Ripple had become a leader of something.

Hana was close to Mana, and seemed to act as her voice of reason.

Pam, however… Her silence so far, save for a few choice words, has made her hard to read. From her tone and expression, one word came to Ripple's mind.
Grandma.

Not in the sense that she's old, but she really does seem like someone who would act like your basic grandma-type. Elegant, soft-spoken, probably wise beyond her years too.

But no, Ripple had never met any of them.

“No, I can’t say I have. This is my first time seeing them.”

“I see…”

Pam closed her eyes and folded her arms.

“Listen. We’re both outsiders. I have no idea what’s going on either. So I’d like to take this moment to say that we should be equals, okay?”

“Huh?”

“I may be higher in rank and from the Land of Magic, but you are my equal, and I respect you. Don’t put me on a pedestal,” she said with a smile.

Pam was definitely on the nice side. In a group where many of the others seemed to be concerned for their own well-being, Pam was different.

Ripple nodded,

“If that’s so, I’ll do that,” said Ripple, while smiling.

Perhaps Pam wasn’t like others from the Land of Magic.

Her manners were just like a grandmother. Caring for others. It’s still too early to judge, but so far, this was the impression that Ripple had gotten.

The group’s mix was certainly going to be interesting.

☆ **Toko (Remaining Time: 22 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

Damn it.

Damn it.

Damn it.

Plans change. Toko knew that. Plans always change. Toko had adapted to that. She and her partner had escaped to B-City, and now was being tracked again.

She thought she could surprise Mana with the group attacking, but it wasn't the case.

And now this barrier's here, so she can't run again. The barrier seemed to be the work of the Foreign Affairs Division.

To make things worse, it looks like Pam was here with the hunt to.

Shit.

Toko was busily typing on her own Magical Phone. Thanks to her diminutive size, she had to physically push the buttons and kick them as well.

Perhaps she could ask for help.

A reply came,

The barrier's pretty tough, nyan.

Even with a Magical Girl's durability, it's impossible to survive touching it for more than a few seconds, nyan.

Also, the barrier is a sphere, so underground or even flight is out of the question, nyan.

Even with my powers, I can't possibly disintegrate the barrier in time, nyan.

Damn it.

Toko angrily replied again. Was there no escape? No rescue? Is she actually going to be caught here at last?

That can't happen.

The next reply was quick.

Don't give up yet, nyan.
I know about this kind of magical barrier, nyan.
There's a limit of 24 hours mostly. So at the most, you should survive one day, nyan.

You can handle that, right? Good luck, nyan!

The urge to slam the Magical Phone was high. What's the point of having someone on the outside if they can't break you out?

But she did make a good point. 24 hours. Toko only needed to last 24 hours. Those 24 hours could be used to hide… or fight.

That's right, Toko's partner. She's powerful. A powerful assassin, and a powerful combatant. If push comes to shove, she can kill the Investigators. Might draw more attention to them though.

Although her partner's strong, it doesn't mean she's invincible.

Mao Pam is a problem.

She's one of the few Magical Girls that could take on her partner, and this was an extreme problem for Toko. If her partner dies…

Toko would feel a tinge of sadness if that's the case as well. Despite all of this, she does care for her partner.

The plan was a simple one. Her partner would bring Toko to her school, and there, Toko can create more Magical Girls. Reinforcements. So long as Toko played the part of the nice fairy.

Since the Land of Magic didn't know what her partner looked like, she could blend in as well.

She could hear the High School kids now, chatting it up below, cheerfully laughing. It's time to get to work.

Toko brandished her cutesy smile, and flew down towards them.

Chapter 3:
The Prisoner

Magical Girls.

Their duty was to give the hopes and dreams to everyone. All of that are illusions. Nobody has the same hopes and dreams, so it's futile to try and create a peaceful world like this.

Would you deny someone's dreams if they didn't fit your sense of morality? What makes you different than criminals who do the same to you?

Ah, but the Land of Magic is a land of rules. So, they must have enforcers to these rules.
Magical Girls spread hope, so long as that hope is perfectly within the moral boundaries determined by the Land of Magic… but of course, who else is fit to decide the rules?

What happens to Magical Girls who break these rules?

Well, two things can happen.

The first is that they don't get caught. The Land of Magic likes to make the Magical Girls believe that they are all-powerful and all-seeing. With their administrators and mascots running around, trying to fit them in a nice little order.

The truth is far from that. Due to the internal infighting of the Land of Magic, they are far from omnipresent. Each and every one of their Divisions acts like a power bloc.

The more power they can exert over the entire administration, the more Magical Girls they can recruit to their Division, the more they can have their own agendas advanced.

Now the second thing that can happen to you is if you get caught.

Getting caught itself depends on if the Land of Magic can harness enough manpower to hunt down one Magical Girl, or multiple, depending on the circumstances.

The Division in charge of these manhunts is the Examination Division. It's a vague name, but it roughly means to examine every aspect of your life as a Magical Girl.

The Examination Division's job is to track down any rogue Magical Girls, ensure no powers are being misused, and to operate as a security group within the Land of Magic.

Recently, a Magical Girl known as Snow White has been making a name for herself. Publicly arresting many rogue Magical Girls throughout the last 2 years. She is efficient in her job, and some say she doesn't even rest at all.

Earning the nickname of “Magical Girl Hunter”, she is the epitome of an Examination Division agent, and one of the best in the field.

With that explanation out of the way, what happens if you get caught by these Examiners?

Magical Girls that get caught committing crimes are sentenced in two different ways, depending on their severity and mental state.

Magical Girls who commit crimes but are otherwise considered upstanding citizens, perhaps due to an accident with their powers simply get their memory wiped. They would have no memory of becoming a Magical Girl and would return to normal life in human society.

But the ones who are extremely beyond redemption. Those are the ones that aren’t even allowed back to human society because, simply put, it doesn’t matter if you wipe their memories. They will find ways to terrorize people even as humans.

So they imprison them. A life sentence is most common, since Magical Girls can potentially live for a long time.

A maximum security prison, sealed with magical energy that prevents powers from being used within the prison.

But here’s where the hypocritical part comes in. The Land of Magic, once again showing its true colors, denied building the prison within the Land of Magic’s own territory.

Housing such dangerous numbers of criminals is dangerous to the Magical Girls of the Land of Magic, so they built it in the human world.

They wish to protect the human world, but they dump all their most dangerous criminals in the human world? What kind of logic is that?

Its location is hidden enough using magic so humans wouldn’t stumble upon it, but still…

…You never know what will happen.

☆ **Pythie Frederica**

When you've spent most of your time in a cell, time begins to pass into a dreamlike state.

How many times has she done this routine? She stood up, arched her back, and straightened her body. Her long flowing hair had touched the ground, and then she began to twist her body left and right.

Pythie then started touching her legs with her arms, bending forward while doing so. Then she began doing little hops. Not powerful enough that her head might hit the ceiling.

Time flows like a dream here.

No, that's the wrong description. It's more accurate to say that time doesn't flow at all. How long has she been trapped in this hellhole of a prison?

A specially designed prison, where time is eternal. Trapped long enough, it can drive a person to insanity.

Daily exercise is what keeps Pythie's brain from burning out of the exhaustion and nothingness inside this damn cell.

In the center of the room was a circular glyph, bright neon purple. The very thing that's keeping her sealed shut.

For just a moment, it fizzled and flickered.

"Bored yet?"

"Is it that obvious?"

As Pythie walked to the middle of the room, she looked up to the ceiling. There was a figure sitting, visible from a hole in the ceiling.

Black and white clothing, with what seems like a red cross worn on her chest. Torn jeans. Her look was that of a punk rock member.

She was also wearing a gas mask for some reason.

And her guitar. She had a guitar, but its shape is different. Instead of a regular body of a guitar, it was the same shape as the cross on her necklace. Red as well. She strummed

it ever so gently. As she did, physical representations of musical notes seemed to emanate from the guitar.

As they passed near Pythie, she could feel a gust of wind pass by her as well. One of the notes scratched her dress. All of them were converging down to the floor, then disappeared.

“Taking your time?” asked Pythie to the figure.

“Ahihihihi… Hmmm? Don’t be impatient. It’s pretty tough to find you, y’know?”

The figure jumped down. A long fall. Not a problem for a Magical Girl.

She removed her gas mask, revealing rough and tussled blonde hair. Her bangs had a red dyed tip, and she wore what seemed like a punk-style hair bow. Leather, with spikes on them.

Such beautiful hair, paired up with such unseemly decorations. A shame.

But still, she came. How long has it been since Pythie’s talked to anyone? Time didn’t flow here normally. It could be days. It could be ages. It could be centuries.

The blonde rock star bowed her head towards Pythie. Pythie smiled, and placed her finger in between her own hair, twirling it about.

“You haven’t changed, Tot Pop.”

“But why would I, Master? Hmm?” replied Tot Pop.

“A loyal apprentice till the end. I don’t give that praise willingly. Well done.”

“Of course I am! Has any of your others done better?” asked Tot Pop, grinning like a small child.

Pythie had many apprentices. She had trained many Magical Girls in the attempt to find an ideal candidate to reform the Land of Magic.

Their system is misguided and corrupt. Changing them has been tried before, and it has failed. More… direct methods of change are required now.

A complete reformation.

One Magical Girl had the right idea, but not the right ambition. The Forest Musician, Clamberry. Her methods for testing Magical Girls were fitting.

Survival of the fittest.

Natural selection.

The ideal Magical Girl is one that won't be defeated so easily. The ideal Magical Girl is someone who can stand for themselves.

Unfortunately, Clamberry's goals weren't as… ambitious.

But Pythie had replicated these tests herself. Trained more Magical Girls this way. Find the ideal Magical Girl. Reform the Land of Magic.

To do that, they must be both mentally and physically strong. Their convictions must be absolute, and their beliefs can't be staggered so easily.

There is one potential Magical Girl that can fulfill that role. Ironically, it's the same Magical Girl that placed Pythie in jail in the first place.

Snow White.

Uncompromising. Efficient. She fights for what she believes is right, and doesn't let anyone get in her way. Not even Pythie it seems.

Ever since Snow White had survived Clamberry's tests, she had hunted down every single *rogue* or *misguided* Magical Girl. She doesn't keep it a secret either. Her exploits are publicly known throughout the Land of Magic.

She's practically setting herself up as bait for others to come towards her.

Clever. Reckless, but clever.

Snow White was the key for the change in the Land of Magic. Many people looked up to her. She could pave the way for change.

The problem is how?

"Hey, Master Frederica. Did you hear about Keek?"

"Hm?"

While Pythie was busy contemplating, Tot Pop was already in the corner, strumming her little guitar again.

“She croaked. Well, maybe… Last time people heard of her she was in her little cyber world and then she just… blinked out of existence,” said Tot Pop as she grinned.

Keek.

Keek was another one of Pythie’s apprentices. Her powers were useful. Pythie taught her well. Ufortunately, Keek wasn’t the answer.

Pythie hadn’t kept up with outside news for now, but knowing the state of the world before she went in prison, it’s possible that Keek may have done something to attract the Land of Magic’s attention.

Perhaps it hasn’t been too long since Pythie had been imprisoned. Pythie wondered where her items were. They confiscated them when she was imprisoned her.

Tot Pop trotted over playfully towards the cell door. Placing her hand on the doorknob. She smiled, glanced at Pythie, and spoke,

“Well, what’re we waiting for?”

Tot Pop turned the knob, and pushed the door wide open. Its creaking noises echoed across the hallways of the prison.

Footsteps could be heard in the distance. A blue haired girl in a gas mask approached Pythie and Tot. She stopped and saluted.

“You ready or not?” asked Tot.

“Barrier is down and will remain down for some time,” replied the gas mask girl.

“Nice! We’re about to head out soon. Keep it down, kay?”

“Roger!” replied the gas mask girl.

Pythie placed her hand on her chin. The accent on that gas mask girl was Japanese. Neither Pythie nor Tot Pop were Japanese-born. As far as Pythie knows, this prison facility was housed somewhere in the United Kingdom.

So Tot's made connections around the world, huh?

"C'mon. We're wasting daylight!"

"We're making a short trip, first. Should be in the seventh cell block. Not far from here," said Pythie in a calm voice.

"Wha-huh!? Uh… why?"

"There's someone I'd like to pick up. You have the barrier down right?"

"I uh… yeah, but… I came here for you, Master Frederica"

"And you will get me. We're just picking up more guests."

"Ah, no no no! Out of the question! There's not enough time!"

"If you have time for me, you have time for them. Now hush, and follow me."

"I… Gah…"

With a look of disbelief, Tot Pop followed her master towards the cellblocks.

Pythie had once researched the Magical Girls that were imprisoned here. There were some notoriously powerful beings trapped within these walls. If the prison hasn't been broken into, they should still be present.

Tot Pop is an excellent apprentice. Clever and resourceful. However, what Pythie also needed was someone with strength, power, and ruthlessness that not even Pythie could match.

And she knew just the two to bring.

"Firstly, we'll unlock the seal of Pukin. Then, we'll move on to Sonia Bean."

Tot Pop looked around for a bit. Palmed her hand in her face, and nodded.

"Shit… Alright, you heard her. Bring the seal down!" ordered Tot towards the gas mask girl.

Pythie twirled her hair around her fingers and smiled.

Pythie Frederica is a Magical Girl. As well as being a Magical Girl, she also works as an examiner, and a trainer. Human Resources Division.

Her job description was to find the right individuals to become Magical Girls. Very simple. However, Pythie also had her own plans.

Thanks to her connections within the Division, Pythie has knowledge on every potential Magical Girl from the East to the West. That's not just counting modern day Magical Girls, but ones created a long time ago.

Pukin and Sonia Bean were fairly old themselves.

Over hundreds of years old, perhaps even more. They were there during the golden ages of Great Britain.

Among these two Magical Girls, a path of destruction and blood always followed them. Their legend in the Land of Magic could very well be compared to the human world's legends of killers such as Jack the Ripper.

Rumors had stormed the two, which caused them to be hunted down. This ultimately served to increase their body count, as Pukin and Sonia combined were a force to be reckoned with.

Pythie had been searching for the ideal Magical Girl.

But for there to be idealism and justice, there must also be corruption and evil. After all, one can't exist without the other.

That's where Pukin and Sonia will come in.

A few seconds later, more magical girls in gas masks showed up. They prepared themselves for what is supposedly a difficult and painful ritual.

Breaking the seal on this prison required immense amounts of energy and strength, and based on Tot's rescue, they must've only expected it to only be for Pythie.

But it can't be helped.

"If my research is correct. Pukin should be here," said Pythie.

One of the gas mask girls dug her hands in the concrete. Her strength pushed it through. Others clasped her hands together, like a praying monk. Magical energy flowing from them towards the one with her hands underneath the concrete.

Cracks that emanate light began to form in the floor, reaching up towards the wall.

Bright neon purple lights began intensifying from the cracks. The stone shook as the large magical energy burst out of it in an explosion of concrete.

Crash!!!

Tearing a hole in the wall, the explosion created a dust cloud. In the middle of it, was a figure. Though silhouetted at first, slowly, bright streaks of orange hair were seen.

An aristocratic musketeer outfit. A rapier sheathed on her waist. Her expression has nothing in it. She didn't even react to the explosion.

Though rustled and dirty through the years, she still retained that picture perfect face of a Magical Girl. Like a hero out of a fairy tale.

"Holy… shit."

Tot Pop said involuntarily.

Not just her. Her little gas mask army also stood there, dumbfounded.

Standing amidst the rubble was the musketeer with orange hair. Outside the wall, was Tot Pop, in disbelief, and Pythie, smiling.

This musketeer girl was expressionless, but without even looking at her expression, you could tell that she will kill you without a second thought.

Tot moved in front of Pythie, but Pythie stopped her. Instead, Pythie walked over. Closer. Closer. Headed straight towards this musketeer.

Pythie then knelt down on one knee. Bowing down before the musketeer, whose face was still not registering any sign of reaction.

"General Pukin… We have come to escort you home"

Pukin's pupils glanced over at the kneeling Pythie. 3 seconds of silence, followed by an upward curl at the edge of her lips.

"Hah… Hahah… HAHAHAHA"

A bellowing laugh echoed the chamber, as Pukin turned around to face Pythie head on. While Tot and the gas mask girls were there, standing their ground, preparing for any sudden movements.

Pukin clapped her hands.

“So… Is this a job offer?”

It was just a simple question, yet the way Pukin voiced it sounded like a threat. Her very aura and her legend generates fear.

“A reward can be negotiated, if you so wish,” replied Pythie.

“Heh, rewards… Bribery will not secure my allegiance. I wonder, what would you do if I were to refuse your offer, hm?”

“Then we leave you be. You don’t have to return to this prison.”

“Oh? So you have yet to plan for my disagreement. You’re quite an interesting one.” Pythie raised her head up towards Pukin.

“All I ask is cooperation. I offer, you may choose to accept.”

Pukin chuckled to herself. She looked around the rubble-filled environment. She took a deep breath, breathing in the first sign of fresh air in a long time.

“You realize what you have done by freeing me, do you not?” said Pukin, eyes displaying interest to Pythie.

“I’ll take my chances,” replied Pythie.

“Ha! Now you *are* interesting… I like you. Well then, where is Sonia? I shall not and will not leave without her.”

“With your permission, we’ll release her as well”

“My permission is unnecessary. Sonia is a loyal servant, with powers that you will find quite useful for what I feel you will ask us to do.”

With her slightly older way of speaking, it’s clear that Pukin really has lived in the past at some point. It didn’t matter for Pythie.

“Now then. As much as I would like to thank you for your appearance, we must hurry. Sonia can be quite the bother when she’s separated from me. Poor child will probably be crying herself to sleep.”

Pukin walked over towards Tot Pop and her little gas mask comrades, pushed them aside, and stood down the hallway. She observed the area, looking left and right. Then, from the movement of her shoulders, it was clear that she was chuckling.

A scream. No. It was more like a shriek.

Thud, Thud

Pythie, Tot, and the gas mask girls looked around to find the source. But they didn't need to look far, as it came from nearby.

Two gas mask girls' necks had been cut. Their heads decapitated, as their bodies slumped down lifelessly on the ground.

Pukin's arm had extended. Her rapier fresh with blood. A single strike is all it took. She glanced back at Pythie, Tot, and the remaining gas mask girls.

"So… Still want to hire me?"

Pythie walked over next to Tot Pop, stared directly at Pukin, and without even a single bit of hesitation, replied,

"I told you… I'll take my chances."

Sonia Bean was the complete opposite of Pukin.

Where Pukin exhibited an air of aristocracy and authority, Sonia looked like a poor homeless child.

Where Pukin has clothing that would be worn by a member of the higher class, Sonia was wearing what looked to be a tattered dress. Dirty, ripped in several places, and completely messy.

Where Pukin is eating with her fork and a knife, Sonia munched with her hands.

Home base. Tot Pop's base it seems. From the door, Tot came in, headed straight for Pythie, and stood next to her.

She observed the two other prisoners, Pukin and Sonia, eating at the dining table. They had requested large amounts of chicken and wine, and had been eating constantly for a while now.

“Hey, Master Frederica… They have… quite the appetite don’t they?”

“Modern food doesn’t suit them. They’ll have to adapt. They’re like a pair of fish out of water. Oh, by the way, thank you for your hard work, Tot. It can’t have been easy breaking us out like that. To have an army of your own is quite the achievement as well.”

“Huh? Oh… yeah, thanks…”

Tot Pop had slumped her back on the wall, her head hung down. The gust of wind on the room made her hair, short as it was, flow ever so softly.

Pythie also relaxed her back onto the wall, intending to comfort her apprentice.

“You seem different, Tot. Why the soft voice?”

“Uh… I’m not the *biggest* fan of our current company,” she said as her head bobbed to the direction of the two other prisoners.

“Tot Pop, are you shy? That’s a first for you.”

“I’m not shy, I’m friggin’ *scared*. You saw what she did back then. What the hell was *that* supposed to prove?”

Pythie chuckled lightly.

“Oh, but I thought you loved a challenge.”

“No shit. If these two pick a fight with us, you’re damn sure I’ll fight back. Doesn’t change the fact that they’re still psycho though”

Tot Pop folded her arms. She took a deep breath and sighed. Her brows were furrowed. She was slightly pouting.

“You really trust those two, Master?”

“Depends on your definition of trust, Tot. Their powers and strength are useful, there’s no doubt. As for their personality… you leave that to me.”

“Yeah… psycho killer swordsman and creepy homeless girl. Killer combo we’ve got right here.”

“You won’t have to worry about Sonia. From the way she’s acting, she’s clearly loyal to Pukin. So, the only one we’ll have to keep on our side is Pukin herself. As long as we appeal to her, we should be fine. Let me handle that.”

As nervous as Tot Pop was, she shrugged, fully confident in Pythie’s plans.
130 years ago, Pukin was part of the Land of Magic’s Examination Division. Her job was simple. Track down any rogue Magical Girls.

She was ruthless and efficient. She had no mercy. Perhaps because of her reputation, she became infamous.

She became known with many titles, *Shogun*, *General*, *Hunter*.

However, it’s not as if Pukin was an innocent soul. In fact, she was the worst criminals in the history of the Land of Magic.

When Pukin was captured, her trial was done underneath a powerful magical ritual that forced her to tell the truth.

There it was discovered the true extent of the things she had done while leading the Examination Division.

Oftentimes rogue Magical Girls would be found dead in what seemed to be accidents or suicides. They were neither. Pukin had hunted down the powerful ones herself and killed them, making sure it looked like either an accident, suicide, or some other tragic event.

Not only that, occasionally innocent Magical Girls would be found dead as well. Pukin would accuse them of false charges, and would hunt them down on those false charges without remorse.

When she was eventually arrested, Pukin believed that this was an injustice to her. For her, building a wealthy and powerful influence among a mountain of corpses was perfectly normal.

Pythie knew all of this because Pukin herself had written an autobiography during her high point in life. A book detailing her exploits, stored and archived within the Land of Magic's many libraries.

Pythie had read them, among other books. That's how Pythie knew just how to influence her.

Ego. That sense of self-worth.

Pukin is a warrior. Pukin is a proud warrior. She would've been an ideal Magical Girl if it weren't for her bloodlust. But that ego is something Pythie can use as leverage.

It's why she kneeled down and offered deals that seemed to benefit her.

Pythie understood that the key to influencing others is to appeal to their interests, and use that as leverage. Threats never work, not always, but desire. Desire is a powerful thing.

Pukin desired blood, and she desired respect. Giving her both was key to keeping her on Pythie's side.

Speaking of Pukin…

"So, what is this job you've come to us for, hmm?"

Tot Pop glanced over at Pukin. Her posture looked normal, but Pythie knew she was nervous deep down.

"Examination team's after an assassin. She's trapped in a barrier in B-City. Needs our help."

Pythie twirled her hair between her finger,

"Tot. How exactly did you manage to break me out of prison so easily?"

"There was a hole in the security rotation. I took the chance"

"But how did you *know* about it?" asked Pythie.

"…I had a sponsor give me info."

Pythie chuckled, and petted Tot Pop's head.

So it was a Land of Magic official. It figures. The Land of Magic would do anything for their internal conflicts.

Breaking free a group of criminals to sabotage other Divisions is not something out of character for them. It would place the blame on the criminals, and not whoever hired them in the first place.

This was why Pythie arranged for Pukin and Sonia's escape as well in the process. A spanner in the works. An unexpected equation.

"Want more…"

Sonia spoke.

Pythie tilted her head. As if in response, Sonia spoke again,

"Food… want more…"

Although Sonia's head was pointed downwards, she was addressing it to Pythie and Tot Pop.

In a rush, Tot ran towards the pantry, grabbed up two rice balls, rushed back in, and offered them to Sonia.

Sonia took one, and put the other one on her head as she gobbled the former.

"…Oh, that's nasty…" mumbled Tot silently.

"Now Tot, these are our guests. We should entertain them as much as we can," said Pythie with a smile.

Pythie slowly began walking towards the door,

"That is your specialty, right, Tot? Do try your best. I have some work to do myself."

"Wha- W-Wait! M-Master, I don't-"

Slam.

Pythie closed the door behind her and walked back to her private chambers. Tot Pop does what Tot Pop does, and Pythie needs to do what she does as well.

A Magical Girl Assassin, hm? Could it be Snow White? Has she gone off the deep end? No, not the last time Pythie saw her.

If it's not her, then who was it? If only Pythie could know where Snow White, or really, where any of the other Magical Girls are, things would be a lot simpler.

Sadly, that's not possible.

Her collection of Magical Girl hair was gone, so she was going to have to start over from the very beginning. Frustrating, but exciting at the same time.

It's hard to explain Pythie Frederica's Magical Skill in one word. It's quite elaborate, but also useful.

The key is hair. Using the hair of a person, Pythie is able to use a crystal ball to see her opponent, as if she had a flying camera.

Firstly, you'd need their actual hair. Preferably fresh and not torn beyond belief. Second, the hair must be twirled alongside Pythie's fingers. Thirdly, it *must* be head hair. Hair from any other part of the body won't work.

But if those conditions are fulfilled, then Pythie could use her powers to see its owner. A powerful ability.

Even if they were in another country. Even if they were far in space. Even if they somehow lived in another dimension. It didn't matter. Pythie's powers will allow her to see what they see.

But it's not only limited to spying and monitoring. Pythie's powers also have another effect to them. Should Pythie insert her hand into the crystal ball, it's completely possible for her to influence the environment.

Grabbing.

Pinching.

Gripping.

Hitting.

Anything you can do with your hands. She can even bring things into the environment, or pull things from there towards her.

Even people. Yes, using this power, Pythie effectively has some means of teleportation.

The only limit is that Pythie can't see through what the target sees if the target is dead.

Now the question is the hair. Is it really hard to get a lock of hair from someone? No, not really. Pythie had perfected it.

You can find hair almost everywhere. Most commonly the bedroom. You place your head on your bed when you sleep. How many people realize that bits of their hair may have torn off? It's such a small detail in your life that your brain blocks it off.

Pythie would use that to her advantage.

Thanks to this ability, it shouldn't be hard to cross the barrier and find this Assassin.

While the Investigation team that they sent may have thought of the barrier as a trap. It doesn't affect Pythie in any way.

If anything, they were trapped with her.

With Pukin and Sonia's help, it should throw them in for a loop.

If there's one thing Pythie Frederica is good at, it's getting someone's trust. She knows just what to say to do this. Her powers aren't combat-oriented, so she's always had to gain someone else's trust.

Tot Pop was also good at this, being Pythie's disciple, though of course, not as good as the master.

Tot Pop was way more stubborn than Pythie. She'd try to do what it takes instead of biding her time. Of course, given her personality, it was inevitable.

Still, she has grown. Being able to negotiate and gather up a strong enough group to break Pythie out of prison was an accomplishment.

Now the matter is getting into B-City.

Within Pythie's private chambers, she had found her collection of hair strands. The Land of Magic may have confiscated hair belonging to Magical Girls, but she still had some normal humans' hair she kept.

During her travels in Japan, she had spent some time gathering hair from barber shops, breaking into houses, and other places as well. Extreme? Maybe. But times like this proves it was worth it.

All she needed was a strand of hair from a resident of B-City. Perfect.

Pythie returned to the dining room, where Tot Pop was still staring uneasily as Pukin and Sonia continued to eat.

"Pukin. I've learned many things about you before I broke you out," said Pythie, startling the others with her sudden statement.

"Have you, now? Then you know of the injustice committed against me, do you not?" asked Pukin.

"The *what*?" Tot Pop blurted out.

"They imprisoned me and Sonia for an injustice. That is a fact," said Pukin, bluntly.

Pythie stood face to face with Pukin.

"You forged false crimes on other Magical Girls as justification for hunting them down. That's why you're imprisoned."

"Forgery, yes. False? I don't think so. I've experience you see, as an interrogator. I can tell which of them is just waiting to be a criminal. I'm preventing the disease before it happens."

"Is that how you see it?" asked Pythie. Her tone still calm. She didn't want to anger Pukin, she just wanted to know how she worked.

"That is not how I see it. That is how the world works. If you had the choice to kill a serial killer when it was a child, would you take it if it would save lives? I would not hesitate."

Tot Pop blinked.

"What the hell kind of logic is *that*?"

Self-centered. A morality centered on herself. Justifies her actions simply based on her own beliefs. With just a few words, Pythie began to understand how Pukin's personality is like.

Pukin closed her eyes and shook her head.

"Regardless, it is a shame that Sonia had to be dragged into prison as well, when she was simply a loyal servant."

Sonia's eyes lit up when she heard her name.

"Hoo… My Shogun… You truly are the best, always caring about the future and about me…"

So that's how loyal Sonia is. Either she chose to ignore the fact that Pukin has and would kill her own subordinates for her own gains, or Pukin is also loyal to Sonia. That is to be determined.

Pythie had all the information she needed. Now is the time to move.

"I would like to ride an aeroplane."

"Excuse me?"

"An aeroplane. I've heard of these. If we're going to Japan, I'd like to ride an aeroplane." Pukin was asking Pythie quite an interesting request. Unfortunately, it's one she'll have to turn down.

"I don't think that's possible. According to Tot, there's a barrier in B-City. As soon as the plane crosses it, we'd die," said Pythie, smiling gently.

"Hmph… A shame."

One by one, they all lined up, as Pythie twirled the hair of a B-City resident across her left finger. The crystal ball materialized the area.

Using this way, they can bypass the barrier.

First, Pukin and Sonia. Then Tot Pop, and finally, Pythie herself.

As Pythie entered the crystal ball and teleported towards her destination, she saw a living room of a nice, well-mannered home. This must be the owner of the hair.

Lying on the ground is an old man whose gagging in a pool of blood. His throat cut open. Tot Pop shaking her head, Sonia waiting in the corner, and Pukin sheathing her rapier.

“What happened?” asked Pythie.

“I told him not to make a noise,” said Pukin nonchalantly.

“It hasn’t even been a few seconds.”

“He tried to make a run for it, I acted. Had he told someone, we would have been exposed.”

Pythie sighed.

“I’m not sure if you understand how my magic works, but the owner of the hair that I used to bring us here must be *alive*. My magic doesn’t work on dead people.”

Pukin wiped the blood stains off her gloves.

“Well, what’s done is done. We should focus on the mission ahead,” said Pukin once more. Not caring about what she may have caused.

No point in arguing now.

Now is the time to search.

“We’ll have to travel on foot. We can’t attract too much attention to ourselves,” said Pythie to her team.

“On foot? I will not tolerate that. We will take a vehicle,” demanded Pukin.

“You want a *car*?” said Tot Pop in disbelief.

“Yes. I shall not settle for less. If we must take it by force, then we shall.”

“Holy crap, man…”

“No, Tot. This is fine. With a car, they won’t recognize all four of us at once. It allows us to travel faster, since B-City rarely gets traffic jams.”

“Master, seriously?”

“Calm down, Tot. We should focus on our mission.”

Pythie didn’t want any turmoil within her team. That would ruin the whole point of being here in the first place.

The problem was securing a car. At nighttime, there weren’t many cars travelling around B-City. So they had to improvise.

As they exited the house, the streets were empty. The group waited, and waited. The cold Autumn wind blowing a breeze in their face.

Then, they saw a single car. American-made. It seemed wealthy enough for Pukin’s tastes. Pythie could tell by Pukin’s smile. The car was zooming quite fast, as there was no traffic stopping it. So much so that it zipped past them.

“Sonia, if you please.”

Hearing Pukin’s orders. Sonia grinned, and in a blink of an eye, she dashed towards the car.

The white, tattered girl matched the car’s speed, running side to side with the car.

The driver of the car looked towards her, and was shocked to see this pale faced girl running inhumanly fast, just grinning at him.

Sonia pierced through the driver’s window, and grabbed the man’s neck. Without so much of a chance, she snapped it, sending the car swerving and swerving.

Uncontrolled, the car crashed into a telephone pole, and the driver’s head was crushed into a bloody mess.

The rest of the group walked towards them within a few minutes. But what they saw was the crashed car and Sonia sitting next to it, crying and sobbing.

“I… I… I broke it… *sniff*…”

Sonia's face was red and filled with tears. Looking at the surroundings, there were tire marks where the car lost control, the damage was not too severe, but there was blood in the front of the seat, and the driver was near unrecognizable.

Tot Pop, sensing that this might be trouble, quickly tried to cool down the situation.

"Ehehe, don't worry Sonia, all you did was kinda mess up the bumper. It'll still drive, you're fine!"

"R… Really…?" asked Sonia, still sobbing.

"Yeah, don't worry 'bout it, kay?"

Pukin approached the car. Despite the scratches and the blood, she looked it over and nodded.

"This might work. Quite expensive looking, this model. Befitting for us."

Pukin took the back seat. Tot Pop took the passenger's seat. Pythie took the driver's seat.

Sonia, however, was dragging the corpse of the man to the street. The man wore a business suit, and Sonia was thinking of taking it.

"Sonia! No witnesses, no remains. You know the rules," shouted Pukin from the car.

Sonia was startled. She looked at the suit, and back at Pukin, then back at the suit.

"B… But I like the suit…"

"Nothing that can be traced back to us, Sonia," stressed Pukin.

"Okay…"

With a sad look, Sonia placed her hands on the corpse. Slowly, a black mass of energy covered the corpse as it began to dissolve into ash, and soon the ash and smoke became nothing.

This was Sonia Bean's Magical Skill.

'*The power to disintegrate*'.

Not only limited to objects, but particles and atoms as well if she wished. There would be no trace of anything if she so much as touches them.

After disposing of the body, Sonia sat at the back, content with being next to Pukin.

The group drove. With the way the barrier works, it's best to go to the center of the city. B-City is a large area, and there's plenty of room for a Magical Girl to hide herself here.

The problem with heading towards the edges of the town is that there is a possibility that they might hit the barrier. The car would be fine, but they won't be.

After about a few minutes' worth of driving, a grumbling sound from Sonia's stomach piqued Tot's interest.

"Wait, did your stomach just rumble?" she asked.

"Sonia is hungry, and frankly, I am as well. Find us a restaurant. I believe that since we are in Japan, sushi would be appropriate," said Pukin.

"We *just* ate, like half an hour ago."

"They come from a time when food is essential, Tot. Besides, when you've been locked up for as long as they have, you'd be hungry too. I'll find us a good restaurant. Sushi sounds great today."

Pythie parked the car in front of a chain Japanese food restaurant. As the group entered the shop, they had gathered strange stares from the customers, but moved on.

After ordering their food, their sushi was delivered to them via a conveyor belt.

"What contraption is this? Is there no respect for labor anymore?" asked Pukin.

"Conveyor belts. People in the modern age prefer efficiency as opposed to hard work. If something can be done quickly, they'd take it. You'll find many restaurants in Japan, especially those that serve sushi, use this method," explained Pythie, calmly eating her sushi.

Pukin grabbed her plate and began eating as well. Just as quickly, she spat some of it back out.

“Rubbish! I remembered the sushi that was made years ago were of a higher quality than this. For all your technology, you’ve hardly improved in cuisine.”

While Pukin was not pleased, Sonia was gobbling up all of her sushi. Eating it with her hands, and munching everything whole.

“Sonia! Show some class!” snapped Pukin.

“Mm… Oh… sorry.”

Nearby, the waiters and other customers began to whisper. The group’s outlandish looks were starting to attract attention.

When a man glanced at Sonia’s direction, Sonia simply stared straight at him, and made a peace sign. This startled the man, and he pretended to not know anything once more.

Normally, Pythie would be in human form, but in this case, none of the group would want that. It’s not like they would be in trouble regardless. None of them worked for the Land of Magic anymore.

“A pity. I saw a movie that claimed sushi was the finest Japanese food, yet the modern taste is horrid,” said Pukin out loud. The loudness made some of the waiters scoff and blush in embarrassment.

“You saw a movie? Hundreds of years ago?” asked Tot.

“Of course not. I saw a movie not a few years ago, I believe.”

“Huh? I thought you were in jail.”

“She was, Tot. However, the Land of Magic can often be fickle. Just as how they provided you with a chance to free me, occasionally they’d let… certain prisoners free,” explained Pythie.

They often do this because there really is no other choice than letting a dangerous Magical Girl loose to solve the problem.

Fortunately for those involved, they took great risks before removing the magical seals from their cells.

Extra protective armor, brainwashing magic, taking loved ones hostage, injecting them with a poison that will kill them unless they inject the antidote, only to be given if they cooperate.

Pythie felt liberated that she didn't have to endure that. Judging from Pukin's actions, she must have felt the same

"Ah, Frederica, was it?" asked Pukin.

"What is it, Shogun Pukin?"

"None of the dishes are coming by. Are they insulting me?"

"Oh, no. If you want more, you should talk to the clerk. If you're rusty in Japanese, I'll help you."

"I have said this once, but you are quite the interesting and talented one, Frederica."

"I'm humbled, truly."

Pythie smiled.

Pukin and Sonia. Pythie needed to collect strands of their hair. This will enhance Pythie's strength.

However, Pythie wouldn't mind collecting their hair just because. Strands of beautiful hair are meant to be preserved.

She'd already gotten a few of her disciple's golden locks of hair. Tot Pop had provided it to her, and always had some to give.

Pythie's love for beautiful hair combined with her powers was a surefire match. It made it that much easier to learn her powers.

Finding Pukin and Sonia's hair isn't hard. Sitting in the backseat, there may be some strands left. Wherever they go, it would be easy to find. No one can fully hide their footsteps, after all.

The sweet smell and aroma of tea calmed Pythie's mind.

As the group ate and ate that night, Pythie calmly sipped her tea.

The game had begun.

Chapter 4:
Hero or Idol?

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 22 Hours, 12 Minutes)

Ripple was wearing a large coat. Combined with her red scarf and the hood, it hid most of her physical features. She kept her head down to hide her wounded eye. Unfortunately, the coat couldn't hide her wooden slippers.

Hana was also wearing a raincoat-style outfit. For her, it's even more important, due to the fact that she has rabbit ears. Her slippers are easier to explain than Ripple's, so she didn't need to hide them as much.

Mao Pam wore a fancier, expensive coat, also with a hood to hide her horns. Despite the fact that this is a stealth mission, it seems like she still has her sense of style to maintain.

Mana wore a trench coat, and kept her witch hat on. She doesn't have many fantastical elements in her outfit to hide.

7753 also wore a simple jacket. Her hat and goggles were perfectly normal in human society, so it's not like she had to hide them as well.

All of the Investigation team wore smoke masks, strapped over to hide their noses and mouths, to make it harder for people to identify them as well.

The four of them walked over to a van. Normally, Magical Girls would be able to travel faster than any van, but since this is a careful search mission, they had to not attract any attention, so a van would be better suited to it.

Parts of the van were a bit scratched up, but 7753, Pam, and Ripple didn't mind.

"Sorry about the mess. We got into a little trouble earlier on," said Hana.

"There's no need to tell them any details, Hana," said Mana.

She looked at the time. Her brows furrowed.

“Shit. We wasted 2 hours. We need to find Toko before the barrier deactivates or we lose her.”

Mana looked back towards 7753 and Ripple.

“Before we do anything, I need to ask you two a question.”

“Yes?” replied 7753.

“7753, Ripple. Your powers. Do they rely on eyesight?”

“What do you mean?”

“Do they *work* on people who are *invisible*? I don’t want any surprises and I need to be prepared for every possibility.”

7753 pondered for a moment. She hasn’t exactly tested out that possibility herself.

“Well… I don’t think it would work if I can’t see them,” she replied hesitantly.

7753 glanced at Ripple. Ripple nodded softly.

“I don’t think I can target someone I can’t see, either,” said Ripple.

Hana nodded, and approached the two.

“Since we’re all sharing. I thought I’d share my ability. I can increase my own senses. Sight, hearing, smell, taste, or touch! Of course, I can do all 5 at once, but then I just get confused by sensory overload…”

Hana began focusing.

“Judging by the way the wind is sounding, I can tell there’s a tree about 20 meters to our right by that hill over there,” she said as she pointed to her right, without even looking. Sure enough, far in the distance, was a tree.

“I can do better. I know that it’s an apple tree, and I know where each apple is on each branch. If I focus enough, I can spot these tiny details,” said Hana happily.

“Wow… That’s so *cool*!” shouted 7753 eagerly.

“Ahaha, it’s not a big deal. It’s useful, though!”

Ripple smiled, bent over to the ground, and picked up two pebbles with her right hand. She threw one high in the air using her strength. The other one, she threw at an angle to the front.

The one she threw second quickly adjusted its trajectory, and within a few seconds.

Crack!

A small shower of grains marked the fact that the two pebbles hit each other head on.

“Whoa… That’s cool too, Ripple!” said 7753 again.

Seeing all these powers in action livened up 7753’s spirit. She always wanted to see heroes in action do this.

Ripple shook her head, “Probably not as cool as you’d think. It only works in a radius of 3 meters. I tested it myself. Had a lot of practice these past 2 years.”

Mana pulled out her wand and began materializing something in her hand. It became a rectangular card. Finally, it materialized. Some kind of driver’s license.

Mana tossed over a Driver’s License towards Hana. It had the exact image of Hana, minus the rabbit ears.

“Just in case we get pulled over. They can’t tell the difference.”

Mana used her wand and seemed to scan the air. After a while, she pointed at a direction and spoke,

“There’s signs of magic in that general area. We get close, we find out if that’s our target. If it is, we go in, we capture her. We’ll need eyes above. Pam?”

Mao Pam nodded. Taking off her coat, large dark rectangular looking wings emerged.

7753 heard the voice of her mentor transmitting through the goggles towards her ears..

“*I need to know Mao Pam’s combat potentia*l.”

Hearing that, 7753 nervously gulped. She couldn’t just put on her goggles. That would be suspicious. The best course of action then was to…

“Um… Mao Pam. Can I ask you something? If you don’t mind… how powerful exactly… *are* you?”

Mao Pam glanced over at 7753. She smiled warmly, and answered with a soft tone,

“Very.”

With that, she flew, so fast that a gust of wind blew from where she had launched herself onto the air.

Perhaps it was because 7753 had gotten on Mana’s bad side, but she felt like many of the Investigation Team didn’t seem keen on working together with her, despite what they may say.

Regardless, the mission is clear. 7753 got into the car.

Ripple, a powerful Magical Girl with a powerful ability. Despite her handicaps and wounds, she seems to know how to handle herself. The most shocking thing that 7753 found out about her was that she was considered part of the *Children of Clamberry*.

They were Magical Girls who passed Clamberry’s tests. Since they may have been corrupted by Clamberry’s morals, they were mostly untrusted by the Land of Magic. Ripple, however, seems trustworthy as far as 7753 is concerned.

Hana seems like a nice girl, but she’s also part of the Land of Magic, so 7753 shouldn’t underestimate her. Her powers will give her an edge when finding people.

7753 had set her goggles to find out information on people, based on the category of ‘number of Magical Girls killed’. Thanks to her powers, she could find the assassin easily with this.

The group entered the car. Hana was driving.

Many people passed by her as the car moved across the highway. Her Magical Girl eyesight and reflexes were very helpful here, as she can process and analyze faster than most humans.

But the amount of brainpower required to focus on every human is taxing, even for her.

After about a few minutes of driving, Hana pointed forwards.

“Hey, look. A convenience store. You could stop by to get some midnight snack, Mana,” said Hana.

“Not really important, but if you insist. Sure. I’ll need all the energy I need tonight.”

Parking nearby, Hana stopped the car, and Mana got out.

“You want me to come along?” asked Hana.

“No. Stay in the car. I can handle myself,” said Mana as she closed the door.

Finally, 7753 can relax a bit. She took a deep sigh and calmed down at the backseat, along with Ripple.

The few seconds of silence were broken by Hana.

“She’s not a bad person you know.”

“Hm?”

“Mana. She’s not a bad person. She’s just… under a lot of stress right now,” said Hana, looking back at 7753 and Ripple.

“Oh. It’s fine, don’t worry.”

“She can be a little harsh, and sometimes she may say some things that seem rash, but… She’s a good person at heart. 7753, Ripple. Sorry if anything she said was hurtful.”

When Hana was talking about Mana, it didn’t feel like she was talking about a superior. Rather, it felt like talking about your closest friend or your sibling.

Ripple smiled,

“Hey, don’t worry about it. Everyone gets stressed once in a while.”

“Yeah, Hana. We won’t hold it against her.”

Hana smiled. “That’s good,” she said.

Hana relaxed herself, her bunny ears drooped a bit downwards.

“Y’know, she’s not a Magical Girl, so it’s tough for her to be out here amongst all of us…”

7753 perked up at those words.

“Wait, say again… *what*!?”

“Mana’s not a Magical Girl. She’s a Mage.”

“…Wait, *What*!?”

“You didn’t notice? That’s why she needs the midnight snack. That’s why we’re using the car as well.”

7753 had such a busy day that she couldn’t even consider to think that Mana wasn’t a Magical Girl.

“But… she looks like a Magical Girl… I didn’t expect… oh my god. A Mage, out here?”

Mages. Different from Magical Girls. They are normal humans that were taught, or learned, about magic.

Unlike Magical Girls, they are more versatile in that they can do mostly anything if they learn the proper spells. Whereas Magical Girls are given a specific special power.

Unfortunately, they are human. Aside from their knowledge of magic, their bodies are human, their physical abilities are human. Which is why most Mages don’t bother leaving the Land of Magic once they arrive there.

Should a Mage encounter a Magical Girl, it would be no contest. The sheer speed and strength of a Magical Girl will overwhelm Mages without a fight, no matter how skilled their magical knowledge is.

Mana was apparently a Mage, not a Magical Girl. The fact that she was down here, hunting down a Magical Girl, was something to respect. Keeping up with a Magical Girl is near impossible due to their enhanced speed and strength.

“Does she always do this?” asked 7753.

“Yes. Mostly. She is part of the Examination Division. She’s in charge of hunting down rogue Magical Girls.”

“But for a Mage, that’s near suicidal. I thought they never left the Land of Magic.”

“Mana’s different. That’s why… please don’t be rash when judging her,” said Hana.

7753 nodded.

Hana tilted her head, “Hey 7753. Shouldn’t you know that Mana’s not a Magical Girl thanks to your powers? You can tell can’t you?”

7753 smiled nervously.

“Well… Yeah, but… I’m not the kind of person who would look at people’s information without asking for permission.”

Hana genuinely looked surprised at that comment. And then, she burst out laughing. So much so that both Ripple and 7753 were slightly startled by her outburst.

After catching her breath, Hana smiled.

“Ahaha! You really are a good person, 7753. They picked the right person for the job.”

“Ah… Thanks, but… Don’t you think that’s a bit much? I mean, I’m just trying not to be rude.”

“You’d be surprised how few people in the world follow your train of thought. Y’know… We could use more Magical Girls like you. I’m sure the world will be a better place if that happened. Hey, thanks for that, by the way.”

“For what?”

“Just being a good person!”

“M-Ms. Gekokujo…”

“Whoa, what’s with this ‘Miss’ thing? You don’t have to call me so formally. Just call me Hana”

“B-But you’re my superior”

“Ahaha! There you go again, being all polite! You might not wanna admit it, but you know you’re a good person!”

“Oh gosh, this is really putting a strain on my head Ms. Gekokujo”

“Hana!”

“O-Okay, Hana…”

“Wasn’t so hard, was it?”

“Argh…”

The two heard a chuckle. Not from them. From someone right next to them. The chuckle turned to muffled laughter.

7753 and Hana saw Ripple, cheeks blushing, laughing, suppressing it with her hand.

Hana smiled, “You okay there, Ripple?”

Ripple shook her head and continued her muffled laughter.

“S-Sorry, it’s just… It’s been a while since I’ve had a good laugh. You two are pretty hilarious. thanks for that,” said Ripple with a smile and a blushed cheek.

“Wha- Ripple, you’re not *helping* me!” exclaimed 7753.

Hana and Ripple both chuckled as 7753 covered her face from embarrassment.

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 20 Hours, 5 Minutes)**

It’s 8 PM. After the fight from earlier, Nozomi headed back to the assigned meeting location.

The location was an apartment on the outskirts of the city.

Nozomi opened the room to her assigned place. There, she found Toko sitting on the table counter.

“Where is everyone?” asked Nozomi.

“Probably at the roof, or at the ship. I’m just glad we got a place to stay, honestly,” answered Toko, as she flew to the side of the window, looking out.

Toko glanced back at Nozomi, giving a wry smile that seemed cute, but felt off somehow.

“Well. They are kids, so they’ll be rebellious if they want to. Y’know, I can’t believe I was able to turn *you* into a Magical Girl.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s not a lot of adult Magical Girls. Sure they exist, but they mostly come from people who were transformed as a kid. You think I could just wave my little hand around and *poof*! Magical Girl? Doesn’t work like that.”

Toko looked outside again. Nozomi took a seat.

“Us Mascots, we can turn someone into a Magical Girl, but they need to have the ambition and the potential. That’s why younger kids who’re still naïve and wanna change the world make good candidates, and why it’s harder for adults to be transformed. But you, you had a lot of potential ambition apparently.”

Did Nozomi really have that ambition? She didn’t feel like she had something so grand. She just wanted to teach and help the kids at her school.

“Hey, Toko…”

“What’s up?”

“What exactly… *Who* exactly is this Evil Witch we’re fighting?”

“She tried to catch me. She’s been chasing me everywhere. You ever read any Manga or watch Anime? You should know what having a relentless pursuer feels like, then.”

Toko didn’t even flinch with that answer.

Nozomi sat down in the sofa, sighing at the circumstances she’s in right now.

Earlier today, just moments after their first fight, Nozomi and her students had returned to the Science Lab. Despite being unable to stop the Evil Witch, the kids seemed to be having a lot of fun discovering their powers.

Of course, Toko was as angry as ever on the roof. They could hear her scream out profanities from the lab.

Toko then came down, zipping through the air.

“Okay guys, so I’ve got bad news. There’s a *huge* barrier that’s built around B-City, trapping us inside. It’s that witch’s fault.”

Hearing this, Captain Grace folded her arms,

“We can take ‘em! We outnumber ‘em, right?”

Wedin nodded,

“I shall help organize a plan of attack.”

Rain Pou clapped her hands together,

“Oh, besides! This is good! This means the Evil Witch can’t call for help!”

Postarie, who had been timidly listening in, also chimed in after Rain Pou,

“With my powers, I think we could easily chase them down, too!”

“That’s the spirit Ta-Chan!” said Rain Pou with a smile.

All of these kids had positive remarks. They were all very cheerful children. Nozomi wished they realized just what kind of danger they’re dealing with.

Sitting on the teacher’s desk, listening in but not participating, the only one that felt the same way as Nozomi was Funny Trick, who patted on Nozomi’s shoulder, understanding the nature of the situation they’re in.

“We shouldn’t stay in the school, y’know. They’ll be looking for us here,” said Toko.

“Agreed. We should find someplace else to stay.”

“We should probably change back to human, too! We’ll get spotted easily with these clothes.”

“I’m not changing *back*, let ‘em come for me!”

“U-Umi-Chan, don’t be so rash”

“Hey, we’re gonna end up fighting them anyway, right?”

So many of the children were talking all at once.

“Okay, okay! We need to decide a home base of operations!” said Toko.

“Oh, my grandpa used to live in this apartment on the edge of town. Lucky for us, I have the key to the room. We could crash there for the night,” said Grace.

While the kids were all busy making plans, Nozomi was reminded of a similar circumstance in her life.

At a time when her mother fell ill, her father had to quit his job in order to be able to care for both Nozomi and her sickly mother.

Her father couldn’t usually be home if he kept working, so he decided to spend more time with his family than to let Nozomi carry the burden of caring for her mother.

Eventually, however, despite his best efforts, Nozomi’s mother passed, and her dad had become a shell of his former self ever-since.

He became untalkative, and unfriendly. He was a changed man, for the worse.

Nozomi couldn’t help but feel that she might be playing the role her father had played in this scenario.

The only hope she had is that these kids don’t end up like her mother.

“So it’s settled then. We’ll go back to our human forms until we find the Evil Witch,” said Rain Pou.

“Er, that *might* not be the best idea for one of you here,” said Toko.

“Mei would prefer not to.”

The genie girl raised her hand. She stood up and shook her head.

The girl known as Mei pointed to a location in the Science Lab. The small aquarium, where the Science Lab’s pet turtle used to be.

It was gone.

"…No way," muttered Grace.

Yet again, it seems that the laws of physics and common sense had been violated by magic.

Everyone else either had faces of realization or faces of shock. For the most part, nobody seemed to question who Mei was, as there were far more important things that were being considered, and Mei was co-operative.

A lot of people assumed that she was just there. The brain oftentimes works like that. Nobody ever thought what her actual form was.

"So, I feel the best way to start strategizing is to know ourselves. Let's begin."
The awkward silence was interrupted with Wedin writing on the whiteboard of the Science Lab.

Wedin (Mine Musubiya – Class 2D) – *Promise based powers* – Physical abilities not high

Captain Grace (Umi Shihabara – Class 2C) – *Can summon a pirate ship* – Physical abilities very high

Tepsekemei (Mei – Science Lab Egyptian Tortoise) – *Assimilate with the Wind* – Physical abilities moderate (?) / Can also fly

Funny Trick (Kayo Nemura – Class 2C) – *Switch two hidden things* – Physical abilities very high

Postarie (Tatsuko Sakaki – Class 1B) – *Send objects back to their owner (will fly?)* – Physical abilities not high

Rain Pou (Kaori Ninotsugi – Class 1B) – *Create a rainbow bridge* – Physical abilities moderate

Kuru-Kuru Hime (Nozomi Himeno – Language Teacher) - ???

Oh right. Nozomi hadn't told them about her powers. She hadn't bothered to check the description on her Magical Phone.

"Ms. Himeno, if you would please?" requested Wedin.

Nozomi fumbled around with her phone, and read the description aloud.

"Um… Manipulating magical ribbons?"

A lot of the other girls had confused looks. Wedin simply nodded and added that to the list on the board.

"Then it's time to test it out. If you would please, Ms. Himeno," urged Wedin, standing in front of Nozomi.

The Class Representative of 2D, so matter-of-fact and direct in this extraordinary situation. Nozomi almost had no idea how to react.

"I don't… understand what you want me to do?" asked Nozomi.

"Use your powers. How strong are these ribbons? Can you really manipulate them? How long are they? They're ribbons, so I should be fine as a test subject."

"Er…"

Seeing her serious face, Nozomi knew she wasn't playing around.

Nervously, Nozomi did what seemed instinctively natural to her. She remembered when she did a similar thing earlier during the fight. That was instinct.

She focused, and ribbons materialized in her hands. She threw it towards Wedin, and seamlessly, she managed to tie her up flawlessly.

Wedin tried to struggle, to break the ribbons.

A Magical Girl's strength is extraordinary, but it seemed like it doesn't seem to work on Nozomi's ribbons.

"Hmm… I see, so they can withstand strength. This could be useful," said Wedin calmly.

"I still don't know how you can be so calm about this," said Nozomi.

“Ms. Nozomi, your magic of being able to tie up someone in something they can’t break out of would be useful in a battle.”

“I… guess?”

“Yes, Bondage magic.”

“Excuse me!?”

“Ah, perhaps you don’t know. It’s similar to situations you can only find in erotic games or manga”

“I-I know what it means, it’s just… Musubiya! why is a Class Rep like you talking about stuff like that?”

“It is only natural”

“No it’s not! I’m still your teacher, you know! Even if it’s not school hours, you shouldn’t talk about inappropriate things!”

Nozomi released the ribbons from Wedin, allowing her to be able to move again.

After readjusting, Wedin began nodding. She then proceeded to look at her own hands,

“My power is the power of an absolute promise. I theorize that anyone who makes a promise using my powers must keep it. Though I don’t know if it’s forced upon or if there’s a punishment to breaking it.”

“Pretty scary,” mentioned Captain Grace.

Wedin nodded her head, and continued,

“Indeed. My power symbolizes the horrors of marriage. The bonds of matrimony are sacred till death do them part. It is quite possibly the deadliest deal you can make. Thus my name, Wedin.”

“M-Musubiya! Again! Why is a Class Rep like you talking about stuff like that!?” shouted Nozomi with embarrassment.

“It is only natural.”

“Your idea of what’s natural for a girl your age is quite unique…”

“Hey guys, you notice something weird…” said Captain Grace.

She stood in the middle of the group, looked at everyone in the group one by one, and folded her arms while furrowing her brows.

“I don’t watch too many Magical Girl Anime back then, but… Weren’t they all a unified team?” she asked boldly.

Grace pointed to herself, and continued,

“I mean, look at us! I’m a pirate! Okay, sure… Kayo’s a magician, Teach is a ballerina, we’ve got a genie… Our costumes don’t match. We don’t even have a theme! I don’t know about you, but we look like a mixed batch of random. We didn’t even pick our *names*!”

To be honest, Nozomi’s Magical Girl name is quite embarrassing. Kuru-Kuru is Japanese for being wound up in a string. Hime means Princess. Her name would definitely mean ‘A Princess who’s strung up clumsily’.

If she could pick her name, she definitely wouldn’t have picked that.

“A theme and unifying names would certainly be an important asset to morale… We have nothing in common,” thought Wedin out loud.

Rain Pou clenched her fists, “No, you’re wrong guys! We *do* have something in common! We don’t need unifying costumes, we’re here to defend our school! We all go to school here, and that’s our unifying trait!” she said, an excited smile on her face.

Wedin nodded, “That seems like a justifiable reason.”

“Besides, you all saw *Cutie Healer* right? Every season they change themes! For us it’s just like… well, all the seasons united together!” said Rain Pou.

“Ah, yes. Now, on to the more important question. Are we bestowed powers fantastically, or scientifically? Are we *Cutie Healer*, or are we *Star Princess*? These Magical Phones suggest science, yet our powers seem fantastical,” stated Wedin in a serious tone.

Funny Trick scratched her head, “I… really don’t think it matters where our powers come from.”

“Yeah, aren’t they the same anyway,” echoed Grace.

“False! *Cutie Healer* was blessed with magic, using her staff to fight evil. *Star Princess* is a space queen, and uses scientific gadgets! They’re different!” argued Wedin, her face red with fury. The candle in her outfit burning brighter as she spoke.

Truthfully, Kuru-Kuru Hime never saw Wedin like this. Normally the proper Class Representative, she seemed to be a closet Magical Girl fan.

“Furthermore, the concept of a magical girl is very broad. So long as they’re warriors granted powers of magic, fighting injustice in the world, you could classify them as a magical girl. Regardless if they’re battle-hardened space soldiers, forest elves fighting for justice, or a regular schoolgirl that got lucky.”

The whole classroom went silent.

“…Wow. I didn’t know you were… Er… such an Otaku for that stuff- Ow!”

Captain Grace talked, and was kicked in the feet by Funny Trick soon after.

This was a nice scene. Kuru-Kuru Hime’s students all having fun together like this. It was a good change of pace indeed.

But it’s getting late. If what Toko says is true, then whoever that witch is might look for them in the school.

“Well. I think it’s time for us to move on, everyone,” said Hime, in a voice that she uses as Nozomi when she’s teaching classes.

“Wait! Before we go, we should pick a group leader. Every Magical Girl group has a leader! I personally volunteer,” said Wedin.

“Oh no, I’m steppin’ up!” replied Grace.

Most of the girls nodded, some shyly did so, others just shrugged.

“Alright, we’ll do it like a real vote. Anonymously. Write down your choice and pass them over to me, I’ll count,” said Hime.

After a few minutes of silence, the notes were passed, and Kuru-Kuru Hime read out the results.

“Oh my, a close match. Wedin wins with 3 votes, and Captain Grace came second with 2. We have our leader!.”

“What!? I only got two? Hey, Teach, who’d you vote for?” asked Grace.

“A voter’s secret is their personal right,” said Hime with a smirk.

“Tch! She can’t even *fight*!” complained Grace.

“A sore loser is not fit to become a leader of an army,” retorted Wedin.

“Yeah, and a leader that gets beaten up in 5 seconds isn’t much of a leader, either.”

“We all share the blame for that defeat. Let’s not pretend you succeeded where we failed.”

“Except I did. I actually lasted long enough to get a few hits in!”

“Alright, you two that’s enough. We did a vote, so we’ll stick with the vote, whether you like it or not,” said Hime, eyes focused on Grace.

Grace pouted, but nodded begrudgingly, reluctantly accepting Wedin as the official group leader.

☆ **Captain Grace (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 52 Minutes)**

Captain Grace had a secret base. A secret base that only she had access to.

Yes, secret bases do sound like something a pirate might have. What with all their hidden treasures and pirate coves and whatnot.

Although Grace isn’t *really* a pirate, she was dressed as one. Might as well play the part. Even if she didn’t really have her own treasure island, or hidden cave of wonders.

On the outskirts of B-City, there was an old apartment block. It was probably older than Grace’s grandparents, since it was built such a long time ago.

The apartment building is practically abandoned by now. Nobody lives there anymore, save for maybe a few old people.

It was the perfect location for a secret base of an adventurer.

A long time ago, Grace had thought to herself, ‘I want a secret base! Please, please, please, pleaaase!’

And so she begged to her grandfather, since he owned the apartment there. Eventually, he caved in and agreed that once Grace comes of age, around High School, she'll get the keys to the kingdom, so to speak.

Since then, they've slowly began moving Grace's furniture over towards that apartment complex little by little. They've got a nice water system set up. They even gave her the key to the apartment when she finally came of age in High School.

But only for emergencies.

Well, now's as good as time for an emergency as ever.

Since it hasn't been taken care of in ages, and really, Grace hasn't bothered using this apartment for a while, despite begging for it a long time ago, it's a little bit of a mess.

Not the *best* choice for a Magical Girl secret base, but it'll have to do for now.

Before that, however, Grace wanted to test something. Since everyone else has already done so, why not test her *own* powers for once.

Captain Grace's Magical Skill,

Summons a really cool pirate ship

Time to put it to the test. But first, a location. Since Grace had no idea how the ship would actually show up, she'd prefer to pick somewhere wide and empty.

The school backlot would work.

Of course, before that, she needed someone else to see it with her. Someone like her close friend Funny Trick, who she totally didn't drag along forcefully to the roof.

Feeling the magical energy surge inside of her, Grace was caught by surprise when, sure enough, a large 10 meter length pirate ship miraculously warped into existence on the parking lot.

Captain Grace couldn't help but smile widely at this event. She laughed and screamed out,

"Woohoo! Kayo, you see this!? Look at this ship, it's so *cool*! Woohooo!!!"

After the girls had reached the apartment building, it was time for a one hour break.

Captain Grace and Funny Trick were sitting across each other, a mahogany table separating the two.

They were inside a fancy looking wooden room. However, they weren't in the apartment. They were in Captain Grace's ship, which is currently behind the apartment, somewhere in the backlot.

After some experimentation, it seems that anything originating from the pirate ship has had its strength proportionally scaled to match a Magical Girl's. So furniture here wouldn't be destroyed so easily.

On the table were some coffee and hot milk, which Captain Grace and Funny Trick have been enjoying while talking.

Despite the calm atmosphere, the face that Funny Trick was making was rather off-putting to Grace.

"Umi, listen…"

"Hm, what's up, Kayo?"

"Can you not do that again?"

"Do… what?"

"Earlier with Wedin, you got cranky, picked a fight. Please don't,"

Captain Grace's eyes widened with surprise, her cheeks turning red.

Damn it, why does Kayo always have to be like that. Ever since they met, Kayo had always been the one to try to either cool Umi down, or just tell her when something she's doing is wrong for some reason.

It's frankly rather annoying, but Kayo is also right… Not that Umi would want to admit it out loud.

"Well… sorry, I guess. I was just trying to… y'know, give people a reason to make me leader of the group."

“Yes, but the way you did it…”

“What?”

“Hmm…”

“What!? Spit it out, Kayo!”

“You were being a bully.”

“Tch- No!? No… No I *wasn’t*”

“Umi, you and I both hate bullies. Don’t lie to yourself. If you were her you’d say the same thing.”

Umi instinctively tried to draw the conversation away by drinking a glass of milk.

Hot milk.

“Ah, *shit*!”

Umi said as she slammed the glass to the desk. Fortunately, since the glass originated from Captain Grace’s ship, it didn’t immediately break.

From the other side of the table, Kayo snirked.

“What’s so funny, huh?” asked Umi.

“You haven’t changed one bit, you know that?”

“Neither have you. Annoying as ever, telling me what to do…”

“Nope. You’re stuck with me forever”

Umi sipped her tea, this time checking the heat before she drank it. Afterwards, she wiped her mouth of any of the remains, and smiled.

“Wouldn’t want it any other way, though,” said Umi with a grin.

Kayo was fairly timid back in the day, and Umi would often stand up against any bullies. At the same time, Kayo would also keep Umi’s temper at bay, and is the rational half of the two.

They’re opposites, that’s why they became so close together.

“Hey, promise me you’ll play nice with the others?” asked Kayo warmly.

With a sigh, Umi answered back,

“Alright, alright… I’ll play nice. After all, Captain Grace has to defend her crew right? Haha!”

“Always the hero type,” chuckled Kayo as the two continued their nightly stay at the ship.

☆ **Postarie (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 40 Minutes)**

Tatsuko, or Postarie as she was now called, was sitting on the roof of the apartment. Next to her were two others.

Kaori, or Rain Pou, a close friend, and the wedding-dressed girl, Wedin.

The three of them were sitting in a group circle, as the girl known as Wedin passed around some notes that she wrote down.

“So, I’ve gathered some facts, if you will, I had help from Toko in researching this, as well as what I have physically experienced. I assume this will help us all,” she said as she passed it around towards the two.

The notes contained writings, often just a few sentences, written completely on a notebook page.

Magical Girl capabilities

Enhanced Strength

Enhanced Vision (Night Vision included)

Does not need sleep

Does not need food

Does not need to excrete

Physical appearance will tend to be aesthetically beautiful

Identities must be kept secret from humans

The objective is to protect the world from danger

The handwriting on the paper was actually quite neat. With a slight curvature that can only be found on people with proper penmanship.

“You made this all by yourself?” asked Postarie.

Wedin shook her head, “Partly, yes. I also used this chance to test my powers. Toko was willing enough to do it.”

“What’d you do?” asked Rain Pou.

“I said that if I promised to live my life as a Magical Girl, Toko would need to promise to tell me everything he knows about Magical Girls. She agreed, and, well, here we are. It seems that’s how my magic works.”

Contrary to her cheerful excited attitude at the moment, Wedin’s power was actually quite scary if used properly.

The power to seal a promise. Not being able to go behind your word. The only saving grace is that they must make the promise through Wedin.

“This is pretty useful,” said Rain Pou.

“Thank you! I have much to research and so little time to do it. So, I must bid you two farewell for now!” said Wedin, as she bowed and left elsewhere.

Postarie smiled as she watched Wedin leave, “She’s nice.”

“Yeah. Upperclassmen can be nice sometimes. They’re not all scary, y’know?” said Rain Pou, bumping Postarie’s shoulder.

The two girls saw Tepsekemei flowing and floating in the air just then.

“Mei? Hey, Mei! Down here!” yelled out Rain Pou.

Mei tilted her head in confusion, and floated downwards towards the roof, meeting the two once again.

“Yes? You called Mei?” she said with a blank stare.

“We wanna see your powers! right Postarie?” said Rain Pou excitedly. Winking at Postarie as well.

“Huh? Oh… Well, that would be nice, yes,” she said with a sheepish smile.

“You’d like Mei to show you her powers?” asked Mei.

“Yeah, c’mon!” urged Rain Pou.

Mei nodded, and in an instant, her body looked like it had been swept up by the wind, becoming transparent until it became invisible.

From a nearby box, which for some reason was strewn on the roof, Mei appeared inside of it.

“Mei can become the wind, and can slip in to anything,” she said.

Mei then disappeared and became one with the wind once more, before blowing the box to shreds using air pressure.

“This is also possible,” said Mei as she became visible again.

She then floated above the roof, and began to split apart into 9 different Mei’s.

“As Mei is the wind”

“Mei can be split up”

“Mei can fight separately”

“Mei will confuse the opponents”

“Mei will confuse the Evil Witch”

“Mei has just discovered this recently”

“This power is very exciting to Mei”

“Mei cannot wait to use it”

“But that’s not all…”

9 of them spoke one by one, before clumping together, and forming into a gigantic Tepsekemei.

“Mei can also do this,” she said as her gigantic form floated in the air.

She then placed her finger on her forehead, and once again shrunk to her original size. She folded her arms and floated in the air.

“Oh my gosh… That’s so *cool*!” cried out Rain Pou.

“That’s amazing, Mei!” said Postarie as well.

“Thank you. Mei is… very happy.”

After what Postarie learned about Mei, it makes sense that Mei would have a harder time showing emotion. A tortoise doesn’t do that much emoting.

Mei was cute in a way, there was still that affection that Postarie had when she would see Mei in the aquarium. Only this time, Mei had become part of them, and can communicate with them.

She was still the class pet that everyone loved, though.

“Oh. I have a request. I hope you do not mind, but please hit Mei,” said Mei suddenly, pointing at Rain Pou.

“Huh? Me?” replied Rain Pou.

“Yes. There is something Mei wants to show you.”

“I… don’t think I wanna *hit* you, Mei.”

“It’s okay. Mei will be fine,” reassured Mei.

Mei thrust her right fist into her left palm. “Hit Mei. Like this. Hard.”

Postarie looked a little nervous, and so did Rain Pou, as she slowly stood up and sighed deeply.

“Whew… Okay then, Mei… sorry if this hurts.”

Rain Pou thrusted her fist towards Mei’s torso, the speed of a Magical Girl making her fist nearly super fast. However, as soon as Rain Pou’s fist made contact with Mei, it seemed to pass through her, and Mei’s form distorted like a foggy smoke cloud.

Mei then reformed just as quickly behind Rain Pou, and tripped her backwards before catching her.

“If you were Mei’s real opponent, then Tepsekemei has defeated you,” she said as she helped Rain Pou stand up once again.

“Wow!!! That’s so cool! Nothing can hit you! Nice!”

Postarie clapped happily, “That’s amazing, Mei! Good job!”

“Mei has also just learned that this was possible. Thank you.”

Mei looked up at the sky.

“Now that Mei has shown you powers. Mei would like to ask you something.”

“What is it?” asked Postarie.

“Mei wants you to fight hard. When the Evil Witch comes, you will fight with Mei, yes?”

The sudden change in topic caught Postarie off-guard. Rain Pou nodded besides Postarie,

“Of course we will. Together,” she said with a smile.

Postarie didn’t want to fight, but everyone else is here, and if she doesn’t fight, then she will probably be a liability, or worse, they might end up dead…

So Postarie nodded, since she didn’t have any other choice,

“Yeah… Together.”

Tepsekemei nodded,

“Mei has been given something amazing. Mei sees everything clearly now. Mei doesn’t want to die. Mei didn’t know about death before. Now, Mei knows. Mei is scared of dying. That’s why Mei will fight. Mei is happy that Mei’s friends will fight, too. Thank you.”

Without another word, Tepsekemei floated once more, cross-legged, cross-armed, floating within the sky.

Perhaps this is what it felt like to a creature of instinct that finally has their minds opened to a bigger world.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 22 Minutes)**

Information gathering is a very important task, but information *sharing* is arguably just as important.

For the past few minutes, Wedin had been gathering information about her group’s powers and abilities, and teaching them to everyone as well.

She spent 20 full minutes doing this, and with mostly everyone ready and done within the apartment, there was only one more left to teach.

She was on the roof… This is going to be a tough one. Wedin made her way up, and sure enough, she saw Mei floating around.

Deep breaths. Here we go.

“Okay, Mei. So… your magic is…?”

“Consume the air”

“No, no no, not consume, become… *become* one with air, the wind,” said Wedin.

“These words. Why are they hard? Mei understands how to use Mei’s magic.”

“Yes, but… okay. Let’s move on then. Funny Trick’s ability is…”

“Who is Funny Trick?”

Hearing that answer, Wedin sighed and placed her finger on her forehead, massaging it as she tried to hide her disappointment.

“Okay… Let’s start over…”

Wedin shouldn’t really blame Tepsekemei for this. Considering the fact that she is a tortoise. It’s going to be quite hard to properly teach things to her.

During her days before being a Magical Girl, Wedin had always been interested in Mei. She was always there in her little aquarium. Wedin had been curious to know what she was thinking at the time, so she’d often sit next to the aquarium and just watch, interested.

She never thought the day would come where she’d actually have to talk face-to-face to explain something to her.

“Alright, my name is…”

“Wedin”

“Good! I am the…”

“…Leader?”

“Correct!”

“But why?”

“Because it’s been decided by a vote”

“But Wedin is a weak fighter. Wedin will lose instantly.”

Did Wedin just get insulted by a turtle?

“M-Mei… I think you’re being… a little too blunt. Just accept it for now, okay… Ehehe”

“Hmm… Okay. Mei will accept Wedin as the leader”

Mei flashed her teeth in a strange looking face, that felt like she was gritting it really hard and showing it to Wedin.

Instinctively, Wedin backed away.

“Er… Are you okay? If you’re dissatisfied, you can tell me you know?”

Mei tilted her head.

“Mei wasn’t dissatisfied. Mei was smiling.”

“That’s… not really what I’d call a smile.”

“Why? Isn’t smiling just showing your teeth?”

“No, it’s… not that simple.”

“Teach Mei.”

Teach? How do you teach someone how to smile? It’s a natural thing for humans to smile when they’re happy, but to think someone wouldn’t understand how to properly smile…

Wedin rubbed her chin.

“Hmm… You need to, curl your mouth upwards, to your cheek.”

“Like this?” Mei said while testing out an awkward smile.

“N-No, you’re forcing it. Relax, let it come to you”

“Like this?” said Mei once again, this time a bit more relaxed, though still a little awkward.

“Not quite… Um, here, let me… Sorry about this.”

Wedin grabbed Mei’s cheeks and adjusted them slowly, moving her eyebrows, lips, and even her cheeks, in an attempt to sculpt a natural looking smile.

“This tickles,” said Mei.

“Please be patient! There!”

Wedin finished, and although it still looks slightly awkward, Mei was practically smiling, or at least it's the closest you can get to a real smile, as she was still stiffing her cheeks.

"If you could remember that position, you're good for a smile."

"This is a smile?"

"Yes. A smile"

"Mei likes it. A nice smile. Thank you Wedin. You are a good leader, even if you aren't strong."

"Yes, thank you… I think?"

Mei's face reverted back to her usual monotone expression. However, this time, Mei was tilting her head with curiosity, looking around.

With a soft voice, Mei blurted out,

"They're here."

Thump!

A soft landing. A girl. Not just any girl, either. To be able to jump and land like that. This must be another Magical Girl.

But who was she? Someone new. Wedin didn't remember her from earlier during the fight.

The Magical Girl stood up.

Mei and Wedin also instinctively stood up, standing face to face with this stranger.

Red scarf, one arm, scarred eye? Her hair was tied with a giant shuriken. On her back was what appeared to be a Katana.

With this motif, one word came to Wedin's mind.

Ninja.

Chapter 5:
Showdown

☆ **Mao Pam (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 14 Minutes)**

From high above the air, Mao Pam had been scouting the situation. Several Magical Girls came and went to the roof. Talking, socializing, conversing. Counting them all up, there may at least be 4 or 5 in the building.

Pam wondered if this will lead into a fight. If it did, she also wondered if it'll be an easy fight. While Pam would prefer a smooth operation, an easy fight is something that's quite boring in its own right.

Soaring in the sky like this was freeing to her. Not being trapped in a small cramped car. She prefers it this way.

The others had already discussed a plan when they pinpointed these girls.

Mana and 7753 would retreat to a safe location, with 7753 guarding Mana just in case. With over 5 Magical Girls here, Mana wouldn't want to be near this place in case a fight breaks out.

Hana would take the front entrance, scanning every room to make sure Toko and her partner weren't hiding off somewhere.

Ripple takes the rooftop entrance, cutting off any airborne escapes.

Pam would watch the skies as well. This is a closed circuit. No entrances, no exits. A successful ambush, a quick smooth job.

Only, the problem with a plan is that your opponents would always have resistance. Now the only question for Pam is…

…How strong is the resistance going to be?

In the distance, Pam saw one of the Magical Girls on the roof spot her. Instantly, she turned invisible and transparent.

That one seems strong.

Pam's heart raced, she felt excited. Will this be a good battle?

Pam must be careful not to go all-out. There were innocent people in the area, and if she's reckless, she could kill them by accident.

Pam had four black wings supporting her flight. They were dark thin rectangular-like sheets, large enough to become wings.

One of those wings deformed and altered its shape, curving and hardening. It then floated around Pam, acting as a portable sheet.

The wind was blowing strangely, Pam felt it blowing harder.

Maybe it was instinct, or maybe it was experience, or an inherent danger sense, but Pam immediately moved her floating black shield just to the side of her, and she heard a large clanging noise hitting the shield.

The wind stirred around her as well.

Now it's no longer subtle, gusts of air began to form and seemed to be aiming towards her.

This is not normal wind either, this wind seemed strong enough to hurt her… clumps of air pressure capable of causing damage…

…If they could even connect their hits.

Pam swiftly controlled her floating shield, rotating and revolving it around her, blocking the gusts of wind that seemed intent on attacking her.

While Pam fought the invisible wind, two of her other wings zoomed down to assist her two allies, Ripple and Hana.

This is Mao Pam's power,

'*To fight with 4 black wings*'.

Mao Pam's four wings are controllable by her. She can control them personally, and change their size, shape, density, color, and temperature. She can even have organ-like

shapes pop out of them in order for the wings to be able to act as mini drones as well. Of course, she only has 4 of them.

Of the two that she sent away, one she sent out to defend 7753 and Mana, while the other popped out an eyeball to act as a scout, informing Pam of any danger.

While Pam is in control of these wings, she can use them in any way they're capable of, but for the wings that she sent away, they must act autonomously, and are not smart at adapting.

One wing only has one goal, 'Defend 7753 and Mana', which it will try to do to its best. The other, 'Scout the skies'.

They cannot react to any sudden changes. Not only that, but Pam is short 2 wings, so she will be less effective. She could always call them back, but for now, this was optimal. 2 wings to defend herself, 1 wing to defend Ripple, and the other to scout the skies.
Speaking of defense,

The winds were constantly attacking without remorse, but where's the actual controller? It has to be the genie.

Keep your shields up, endure the winds.

Clang!

If the genie disappeared before…

Wham!

…And it's connected to these wind clumps violently attacking her…

Slam!

…Then a logical theory must mean…

Whoosh!

Pam had set 2 of her wings spinning rapidly, disorienting the wind attacking her, and threw them in a direction.

From the wind, slowly morphed the appearance of the Genie Magical Girl.

So the Genie can become gaseous?

Her opponent showed no sign of any emotion. Her face a blank expression, despite what happened.

Perhaps she's actually quite strong.

Pam thrusted one of her wings towards the Genie, keeping one for herself to remain in flight, and aiming for the Genie's legs. The Genie didn't move, and the thrown wing passed through her leg as if it was gaseous.

The Genie went back to becoming invisible. No good.

If this fight continues to drag on, then Pam will most definitely lose the endurance race, simply because she can't hurt the Genie.

Or can she?

Time for Plan B.

The wing that was thrown, Pam manipulated it, enlarged its size, made it so that it became a large 50 meter diameter ring surrounding the two fighters in the air.

Using her one wing, she blocked the attacks, though some passed through, since she was concentrating on forming the ring around them.

Endure.

Endure.

Endure.

The ring was complete, and now for the final touch. Reducing the density of the ring, and changing the temperature flowing through it…

…Sub-Zero temperature will do.

"Cocytus!" muttered Pam, as the area within her dark ring began to feel colder… and colder…

The Genie, who was invisible just then, began to slowly reappear. She's losing her balance, seems to be wavering. Her eyes expressed surprise.

So it seems her power of flight is tied to her gaseous form.

As the area has gotten colder, she can no longer become gaseous. Cooling the temperature past sub-zero would eventually condense the atoms of that Magical Girl together, keeping her solid, which means…

…Mao Pam had successfully 'turned off' this Genie's powers.

The Genie fell from the air, landed down the ground, and quickly got on her feet, running as fast as she can.

Mao Pam wasn't ready to give up. This could be their assassin.

The hunt is the fun part of battle. And so the chase begins…

☆ **Toko (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 13 Minutes)**

Oh no.

Toko had gotten too lazy. Sure, there were more Magical Girls around her, but she had underestimated that the Investigation Team couldn't find her.

She heard fighting from the bottom floor, and she heard fighting from the roof. Surrounded on two sides. This is trouble.

Toko heaved and lifted the window up. She had to find a way to escape. She can't exactly fly away either, so she had to get to one of the girls. The roof is a much better option than downstairs.

Using her small wings to carry her upwards, she flew towards the roof, and the scene awaiting her was something she didn't expect.

There was Wedin, backed up by Rain Pou and Postarie, but when she got up there, she had stumbled upon an unfamiliar Magical Girl.

A one-armed ninja.

The ninja reacted fast, reaching out to grab Toko with her right arm, but she was tackled by Wedin.

“Help! Get me out here!” cried out Toko.

Instinctively, Rain Pou ran over, grabbed Toko, and placed her in her chest pocket.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 12 Minutes)**

It was instinct.

That ninja wanted to grab Toko, but Wedin jumped in and tackled her. Now Toko was asking to escape, so Rain Pou had to act.

She grabbed Toko and made a run for it.

Jumping down the roof, with Toko safely hiding within her pockets, she used her Magical Skill.

Rain Pou’s power,

‘*To create a rainbow bridge*’

Like the bridges you’d find in children’s books. These weren’t actual rainbows. They may look like them, but they’re solid beams of light.

Rain Pou is able to create them within her field of vision, and can extend it for however long she wants, so long as it stays in her field of vision.

Her instincts now were to *run*! As far away from the apartment building as possible. She jumped off the roof, and landed on the rainbow bridge, running straight ahead.

It wasn’t long until she heard a crash behind her, followed by the rhythmic tapping of wooden shoes. Looking back, she should’ve known what happened. The ninja had beaten Wedin and was now on her tail.

Time to throw her off.

Rain Pou instantly twisted the rainbow bridge from being straight to moving across to the left. While she herself was prepared, the ninja girl shouldn’t be.

However, the ninja girl simply jumped towards the roof, and continued her chase indirectly. She's a persistent one.

"She's *gaining* on us! Rain Pou, go *faster*!" yelled Toko, panicking.

"I'm *trying*!"

Distance between Rain Pou and the ninja, approximately 25 meters and closing.

She could feel something sharp hit her leg. She saw many things flying towards her. Swatting them away, some of them still managed to hit her despite how much she dodged.

These were Kunai…

The ninja would throw them directly in front of her, and they'd change trajectory to hit Rain Pou. These Kunai were homing.

Rain Pou couldn't dodge it, she kept getting hurt in the feet, being stabbed over and over again.

Wait, the feet? Why not the heart?

The ninja didn't want to kill her.

"Kaori!" yelled someone running on her rainbow bridge.

Postarie… Tatsuko?

"Ta-Chan!? What are you doing?" asked Rain Pou.

"Helping you! Come on!" said Postarie as she helped Rain Pou get up.

The ninja wouldn't stop. They had to find a way to escape her. They had to run.

"Where's Grace!?" asked Rain Pou.

"I don't know!" replied Postarie.

"Stop talking and start *running*!" yelled Toko once more.

“Kaori, when I say go, we *run* as fast as we can, okay?” said Rain Pou.

“O-Okay…” replied Postarie.

The ninja was once again on their tail, jumping toward the rainbow bridge. No choice.

Rain Pou grabbed Postarie’s hand and ran at full speed. This is the full power she can muster as a Magical Girl. Something that may be exhausting, but something that’s necessary now.

She twisted and turned in the rainbow bridge, inclines, declines, sudden U-Turns, drops, all to confuse the relentless ninja.

Full speed.

Run.

Distance between the ninja and Rain Pou, approximately 100 meters and potentially closing.

Distance between the ninja and Postarie, approximately 80 meters and definitely closing in.

When they were around 2 blocks away from the apartment block, Postarie, who was barely just lagging behind, began to slow down.

Oh no.

Rain Pou grabbed on to her friend. Slung her over her back, and began looking for options. Scan the area, use that Magical Girl powers. Find a place to hide.

In the distance behind them, a silhouette of a ninja approaches.

Distance between the ninja and Rain Pou, approximately 90 meters.

Find something!

Distance approximately 80 meters.

Rain Pou then noticed an alleyway.

Distance approximately 70 meters.

A van was parked there, not 2 blocks away from their apartment. Didn't the people looking for them have some kind of van?

Distance approximately 60 meters.

Rain Pou was certain that this was the van that was used this morning. Which means…

Distance approximately 50 meters.

"Kaori, you're going to have to trust me, okay? We're gonna be falling, and I need you to use your powers as soon as I say go, okay?"

Distance approximately 40 meters. The ninja is fully visible now.

"H-Huh? R-Roger?"

Distance approximately 30 meters.

Rain Pou built up tension by crouching, and dashed towards the alley, jumping off the rainbow.

Distance approximately 20 meters.

The ninja was still running on the rainbow. Mid-air, Rain Pou turned off the rainbow bridge, and the ninja, unprepared, fell down.

Rain Pou and Postarie crashed above the van. The ninja drop rolled down on the street, unfettered. She continued to run towards them in the alleyway.

"Kaori, *now*!"

Startled, Kaori touched the van, and instantly, it grew large white angel wings on the side. Not only that, it began moving.

Startling both Rain Pou *and* Postarie, the two grabbed on to the roof of the van, as it began flying off as fast as it can.

The ninja, who could not have expected this kind of situation, was dumbfounded at what she's seeing.

With the van zooming through the air, they were finally safe from the ninja…

…But they're going to have to face someone else when this van reaches its destination.

Postarie's power,

'*To return things to their owners*'

It allows her to touch any object, and deliver it back to their owner. Growing wings, there would be two methods of delivery.

Normal delivery, which is a slow, but guaranteed process.

Express, which runs very fast, but will definitely take shortcuts.

The type that Postarie decides will govern how fast the objects actually travel through the air. Not only that, but if the object were to hit a wall, or be damaged in mid-air, then the wings would disappear.

Although Rain Pou doubts a flying van would be stopped by anything anytime soon.

The two of them sighed, and held on to the speeding van.

In the quiet fight, Rain Pou took out her Magical Phone, and texted Grace, informing her about the fight happening outside of her ship.

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 10 Minutes)**

Hime threw her ribbon at the bunny-eared girl. Bunny ears simply dodged it, jumped over Hime, landed behind her, and with a swift kick, managed to kick her outside of the apartment building.

Hime wasn't having a good time fighting this bunny girl. She wasn't having a good time fighting in general.

"It's best to give up. I won't hurt you!" ordered the bunny girl.

It seems sincere, but Hime couldn't afford to trust anyone. Her students come first.

They were on the roof, right? Okay. It's time to test her powers.

Hime threw a ribbon upwards, wrapping itself around the roof. Hime jumped as high as she could, while also pulling herself towards the roof using her powers of ribbon control.

When she got up, she saw Wedin sprawled out on the roof. It seems she was hurt.

“Wedin! Are you okay?” asked Hime as she ran over to her student.

Wedin groaned,

“Argh… That *fucking* ninja!”

Instantly, the rabbit eared girl jumped towards the roof.

“Please, don’t run. If you just surrender, we can work this out without anyone getting hurt,” she said.

“…It’s you from earlier,” said Wedin as she stood up.

“Yes, it’s me. Listen, I don’t want to fight. I’m just here to look for someone. If you two just go with me calmly, we can figure out what’s going on. *Nobody* has to get hurt,” insisted the rabbit girl.

Wedin and Hime were side by side, the rabbit girl far in front of them.

“…What’s in it for us?” asked Wedin.

“What?” replied bunny ears.

“We won’t just surrender without an incentive”

“Not getting hurt is a good incentive”

“Will we still be Magical Girls?”

“That’s… to be determined.”

“Call your supervisor, I want to know”

“I don’t think you’re in any position to make demands. Who are you again?”

“I’m the leader”

“Self-proclaimed?”

“No. Voted in”

What was Wedin doing?

She doesn’t usually talk this much. Unless…

She’s stalling.

The rabbit eared girl was focused entirely on their conversation. Hime picked that up.

Quietly, slowly, she began letting a ribbon drop loose. Like a snake, it slithered across the rooftop floor, getting close enough to the rabbit girl.

Closer…

Closer…

Closer…

“Will we get payment compensation? We have no clue why you’re doing this”

“We have our reasons, and I’m not going to ask twice. Will you guys come quietly or no- huh?”

Rabbit ears’ rabbit ears perked up.

Now or never.

Hime launched the ribbons poised to strike. Aimed at the rabbit girl’s feet, to prevent her from doing anything.

They wrapped around her, and she lost her balance.

Hime worked fast, and the ribbons continued wrapping and wrapping until they covered rabbit girl’s entire body.

Rabbit girl struggled and struggled, but she can’t seem to break these ribbons.

The rabbit girl was now trapped in a cocoon of ribbons, unable to move, and no longer a threat.

Hime sighed happily. Wedin is safe. She can't believe that worked.

But Hime felt something strange.

For some reason, her skin felt the wind tingle sharper than it should.

For some reason, she saw the many cars far away, despite being far, in great detail.

For some reason, she could smell liquid gas of those cars, even though she shouldn't be able to.

For some reason, she could taste the moisture in the air, and the one in her mouth, despite not having anything in her mouth right now.

For some reason, she could hear the roar of engines and everything around her.

Too many things. Why are her senses overloading? Hime couldn't focus.

The last thing she heard before blacking out was the rabbit girl, sighing and whispering. Despite the whisper, it was very loud to Hime.

"*Sigh…* you should've surrendered. It would've been easier that way."

☆ **Captain Grace (Remaining Time: 18 Hours, 10 Minutes)**

Grace and Funny Trick ran as fast as they can.

When they got down, they found almost nobody. Were they too late?

"Where is everyone?" asked Grace.

"I don't know. We need to regroup!" replied Funny Trick.

Grace stepped forward and noticed something weird flying in the sky. A black spherical eyeball, seemingly scanning the area.

"What… is that?" said Grace, pointing at the eyeball.

Funny Trick yelped a scream as she saw it.

Grace's response however, was to grab a pebble from the ground and throw it at the eyeball as hard as she could.

The black eyeball's flight path was disturbed by the clash with the pebble, and it fell down to the ground.

"Yeah! Score one for the good guys!" said Grace, pumping her fist.

However, the eyeball began to morph and change shape, and slowly got up as it somehow transformed into a new shape…

…This one's humanoid.

Large black tentacles sprouted out of its back, and there were no facial features to this strange shadowy black humanoid.

Funny Trick's yelp became a full-out scream.

"What the hell *is* that thing?" asked Grace instinctively.

The dark tentacles began to move, as the humanoid continued to shamble its way towards Grace.

Captain Grace pulled out her sword. If it's a fight this thing wants, it's a fight that it'll get.

Captain Grace charged the humanoid, and immediately went for the heart stab.. She plunged her cutlass deep into the humanoid's chest, but the humanoid didn't react.

Worse, it seems her cutlass is stuck there.

Grace's eyes widened with surprise. The humanoid creature, whose face was a dark black mass, somehow opened its 'mouth', revealing rows of monstrous teeth as it roared at Grace's face.

It lunged at her, attempting to bite her, but Grace let go of her cutlass and used her arms to restrain the jaws trying to get a chomp on her head.

With her free leg, she kicked the humanoid as hard as she could, sending it flying towards the apartment building, where it crashed in a side wall.

The creature didn't react, but its tentacles grew longer, and they morphed into blades.

Captain Grace instinctively pulled out stilettos from her waist. However, while Grace usually loves fighting like this. She can't help but feel strange.

What's this feeling?

She hasn't felt this before in a long time.

This feeling…

Fear.

Grace hadn't felt it ever since 10 years ago, when she decided to stand up against the bullies that bullied her.

Since then, whenever Grace fought, she'd always consider her opponent as prey. Prey couldn't fight back. Prey wasn't a match for Grace.

Even the rabbit girl from earlier today was prey, because she ran away. Grace felt no fear then.

But this thing… This thing fought back, and this thing can't be afraid. It was a challenger, not prey.

In fact, if Grace is not careful, she's certain that she could...

…*Die*.

She didn't want to think of that word. Fear made her think of that word.

Parrying the bladed tentacles with her stilettos, while exchanging blows with the monstrous humanoid.

But the creature was only paying attention to Grace. It had made no attempt to attack Funny Trick. Which means she's free to go.

"Get back to the ship! We're gonna need more firepower to beat this thing!" said Grace, focusing on defense for the very first time.

Funny Trick understood where she was going with this, and ran as fast as she can back to Captain Grace's pirate ship.

The tentacles were fast. Grace blocked as much as she could, some of them managed to push through and hurt her. Nothing fatal, but it still stings.

“Funny Trick! Hurry it up!”

Funny Trick finally reached the top deck of the ship, overlooking Grace.

“Ready when you are!”

“Got it, need firepower!” said Grace as she moved backwards to increase her distance against the humanoid abomination.

Grace removed her hat, and covered her stiletto with it, and after a few seconds, she put her hat back on, only for the stiletto to have changed into a flintlock pistol.

Funny Trick’s abilities, combined with knowledge of where everything in Grace’s ship is, makes for some useful tricks in battle.

Blam!

The shot of the pistol rang so loud, and Grace was not prepared for the recoil it would have. This pistol wasn’t a normal one, it was designed to withstand Magical Girls as it came from Grace’s ship.

When the pistol bullet hit the black humanoid, it punctured a hole in it. The thing actually took damage!

Blam!

Blam!

Blam!

More shots, more holes. Grace kept her distance and kept shooting. The black humanoid was now a liquid mess on the pavement.

However, it’s reforming! Fast, as well! The black creature lunged at Grace again.

“More firepower!”

Grace hid her flintlock with her hat, when she removed it, it became a pirate firebomb. Fuse lit, Grace threw it at the black humanoid. Stunning it as it hit its head.

Boom!

Not working. Still reforming. Still running towards Grace.

Grace picked up another stiletto, Funny Trick prepared another object. They were in-synch.

A harpoon launcher, launched towards the black humanoid, impaling it as Grace used her stilettos to slice it up.

A musket, which Grace used afterwards to blow even more holes in the black humanoid.

Throwing knives, so Grace could keep her distance as she fought it.

Another cutlass, so Grace didn't have to lose her original.

Funny Trick constantly kept giving Grace new weapons whenever she needed it, and Grace danced around the creature. It should've died if not for its regeneration.

"Gonna need something bigger!" yelled Grace loudly to Funny Trick.

"I've got something. Cover your ears!"

Grace was confused. What did she mean. Then she looked back at the ship, and saw what Funny Trick was doing.

Funny Trick was behind one of the ship's weapons. Placed on the side of the ship, were cannons, befitting of a pirate ship. Only this time, these were cannons that were designed to hit Magical Girls.

Grace moved out of the way just in time when she heard the large explosive firing blast of the cannon.

Boom!

The impact of the fire created an explosive crater, and one in which the puddle of black goo had trouble reforming itself.

But it was still reforming.

“Damn it!” yelled Grace.

How was this thing ever going to be put down? Bullets can’t kill it, cannonballs can’t kill it, swords couldn’t kill it.

No matter what, it kept regenerating. You’d need something to stop it from even doing that. Something huge…

…Wait.

“Funny Trick, get out of the ship!”

“What!? Why?”

“Just do it, jump out!”

Hesitantly, Funny Trick jumped from the ship all the way down to the pavement, worried about what Grace was planning to do.

Captain Grace’s power is to summon a pirate ship.

There’s nothing that says it can’t be weaponized.

Grace focused her magic, just like before.

The large pirate ship behind her disappeared. After a few seconds, it reappeared once more.

10 meters long, a true to life pirate ship. Grace made it appear in the sky, in mid-air, and it began falling at an increased rate.

Falling just above the black humanoid creature.

Crash!!!!

The shockwave from the ship crashing to the ground sent large gusts of wind everywhere, and Captain Grace’s hat was blown off from that.

But the black creature was no more. Crushed underneath Grace’s pirate ship, it was finally over. A tough fight, but one that Grace won.

With the fight over, Grace's heart rate finally calmed down, and she couldn't help but grin widely.

"Ha ha!!! *Yes*! We did it! Whoo!" she said, as she patted Funny Trick in the shoulders.

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 50 Minutes)

"Do you see anything yet?" asked Mana.

"No, not yet. They're still there I think," replied 7753.

Together on a rooftop, they were tasked on keeping a close watch on the ground in case someone tries to escape the fighting.

Boom!

A large rumble, like a small earthquake.

"W-What was that?" asked 7753.

"Was that one of us?"

"I don't think so."

Ripple's powers couldn't exactly make that effect unless she was really lucky somehow.

It can't be Hana's either, since she's focused on senses.

Pam might be a possibility, but 7753 hadn't seen her anywhere, not even in the sky.

"Shit, we should've gone in with them," said Mana bitterly.

"Not a good idea. You can't fight these people"

"It's better than just keeping watch"

7753 continued her lookout. She scanned the streets nearby, and scanned the skies around the apartment. Nothing on the ground, but in the sky…

…A large black bird with white wings.

That’s strange. What kind of bird does that.

The bird seems to be getting bigger and bigger, which means it’s getting closer, fast. What kind of bird was this? Magic?

Only then did 7753 realize that what she’s seeing is in fact, not a bird. She looked at the… *thing*, whatever it is, closely.

Bumpers in front.

Driver’s window.

Four wheels

And… for some strange.

“Is that… our van,” asked Mana with wide eyes.

“Oh my god.”

Their van, which somehow has large wings, was aimed to a crash course trajectory with them. It's coming in fast too. Two girls were on top of it, and at the last moment, they both jumped off the van.

Which means the van is going to meteor dive straight for them.

7753 could survive the blast but…

"*Mana*! Get down"

7753 tackled Mana away from the possible crash site, and in about 5 seconds later,

Crash!!!

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

"Ta-Chan, you okay?"

"I-I'm fine… I'm fine, I think."

After that van ride, the two of them jumped off to the rooftop nearby. The fall wouldn't damage a Magical Girl, but she still had to check on her friend, just in case.

"Think you can make that jump?" asked Rain Pou to Postarie.

The jump being the jump from their side of the roof to the roof where the van crash landed, which was now covered in smoke thanks to the van's impact.

"I think… yeah," replied Postarie.

Rain Pou helped her up, and together they jumped towards that roof.

The smoke from the crashed van was huge, and they could barely see anyone from it. With their Magical Girl vision, however, they did see silhouettes of two people, one piggybacking the other, rising up and running away.

"Hey, don't think you can just run from us!" yelled out Rain Pou.

When she was about to give chase, however, a black spherical creature, with an eyeball on it, and what seemed to be dark wings, descended to block Rain Pou's approach.

Startled, Rain Pou stood her ground, while Postarie yelped and stayed back.

"Toko… is this one of your friends?" asked Rain Pou quietly.

From her pocket, Toko peeked out her head,

"Not any kind of Fairy I recognize. I've never seen this one before"

"Doesn't look like it's attacking us," replied Rain Pou.

Toko nodded,

"Could just be a defensive creature. So long as we don't provoke it, we're fine. This is probably someone's ability… maybe."

Rain Pou thought for a while, and smiled.

"I've got an idea. Postarie, could you do your thing on it?"

"Huh!? W-Will that even work?" asked Postarie.

"Maybe. I don't know. We should still try regardless. I'm sure it's safe," said Rain Pou.

"I… Uh… Okay…"

Postarie, with a face that was about to burst in tears, slowly walked over towards the black eyeball creature.

No response from the creature so far.

She continued to walk towards it, and gently, she touched the black creature. Soft carapace.

Just like that, white feathered wings appeared on the creature, and immediately it shot up to the sky, flying away from the two.

Postarie sighed a relieved sigh.

"I think… I'm going to need a long break after this, Kaori."

“Whew… No complaints about that.”

Not much use for chasing the two that got away now. No complaints from Toko either. Against all odds, they managed to prevent Toko from being kidnapped, after all.

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 15 Minutes)

Mana was pacing in the room. She couldn’t stop pacing, she constantly walked back and forth.

7753 and Mana had retreated to their designated meeting spot, an apartment rented out by the Land of Magic specifically for this operation.

“We should’ve stayed,” said Mana, clearly a tone of desperation in her voice.

‘*Calm her down, 7753. This is bad for your team*’, said a voice in her ears. 7753’s mentor.

“We would’ve been outmatched, Mana. You would’ve died if these guys wanted to kill you, and I’m not that good of a fighter,” said 7753.

“*You* left them all back there! They still haven’t called or contacted us, nobody’s here but *us*!”

“Calm down! I’m sure they’re fine”

“Really? You said so yourself that if they wanted to kill us, they would. One of those people they’re fighting is the assassin, you know that, right?”

Mana’s face was getting redder, and she was clearly holding back tears.

“Mana, why are you crying?” asked 7753 with a somber face.

“Because you *fucking* left them behind!” said Mana, lashing out with a punch to 7753’s cheek. The punch had some impact, but 7753 felt nothing, since Mana was just a human.

With that punch, Mana’s tears came flowing, and she retreated to the corner of the room, sat on a table, and tried to hide her face.

“Hey, that’s enough, Mana,” said 7753 approaching her.

Mana glared at 7753, her face red and wet with tears.

“Enough? You know damn right it’s enough. You know something? This entire operation feels like a setup. Why would all these Divisions start sending people to help me and Hana, huh? Land of Magic’s never done that before,” she said, wiping her tears away.

“Maybe because your target’s a dangerous killer,”

“Doesn’t matter. Examination Division handles them all the time. Our target’s not the most dangerous Magical Girl in the world, and already we’re getting a quarantine? They sent Pam in too”

“What about Pam?”

“Pam is a weapon of mass destruction. You don’t send her in unless you really think it’s necessary. She’s a living nuke.”

“You’re being paranoid.”

“Am I? You don’t think… that *any* of this is out of the ordinary? Sending in Pam? Sending in Ripple, who was part of Clamberry’s tests? Quarantining the *whole* city to find one person? And *you*. Don’t act innocent, 7753. Back at the karaoke shop, you were communicating with someone. I don’t even know if you’re in on *whatever* this is, but don’t you dare for a *second* play innocent with me!”

7753 couldn’t deny that she was talking with her mentor all the way. But a setup? Perhaps… Maybe… It couldn’t be, though.

If it was what Mana had suggested, then how important is this assassin, and what’s her ties with all this?

“It’s been an hour, 7753… It’s been an hour and no one’s contacted us…” said Mana, dumping her head on the table.

“Hey, okay. That’s enough crying for tonight, Mana,” said 7753, grabbing her shoulder.

As soon as 7753 grabbed her shoulder, Mana moved over to slap 7753, but with the reaction speed of a Magical Girl, 7753 caught her hand.

“*Hey*! I said that’s *enough*, alright!? You’re the team leader. *Act* like a team leader! I’m sorry that no one’s back yet, but crying about it isn’t going to change *anything*,” yelled 7753.

“I leave for one hour and come back to this? You two must be fun at parties.”

A voice came from behind them. Looking back, the two saw the person on the doorway, opening it with her right arm.

Ripple.

She also had someone behind her. With a scared looking face, nervously, was a pink ballerina, ribbons all around her outfit.

Chapter 6:
The Beginning of the End

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 35 Minutes)**

Headaches.

The last thing Wedin remembered before blacking out was an excruciating pain of everything being magnified at once.

She couldn’t move. Wait, no. That’s not right. She could still move, but something was preventing her limbs and legs from moving.

Rope.

She’d been tied up on the roof. Besides her, just out sight, was Ms. Himeno, in human form. Also tied up.

That was when Wedin realized she was also in human form. Not much strength to break free from this rope.

“Ms. Himeno! Ms. Himeno!” whispered Wedin, trying to get her attention. No luck. She seemed to be out cold.

Wedin then felt her body being picked up. She was casually slung over the right shoulder of the rabbit girl.

“Ngh, so you’re kidnapping me, now?” asked Wedin.

“Kidnapping? You’re the one who tried to tie me up. If anything, you shouldn’t blame me for tying *you* up,” replied rabbit ears as she slung Ms. Himeno on her left shoulders.

“You attacked us in our home. Of course we attacked you back!”

“We asked you to surrender. The first shot came from your group, *leader*,” replied Rabbit Ears.

Her ears twitched and perked up. Her brows curled. It looks like she was troubled by something, but Wedin couldn’t tell what.

“Sirens. The police are coming to investigate. Your little outburst made a mess and you were almost in danger of being caught. What were you all *thinking*?” asked Rabbit ears, sighing.

In an instant, she held on tightly to Wedin and her teacher, and began running and jumping away from the apartment.

The feeling of jumping high up in the air is a lot scarier if you know you won’t survive the fall. Luckily for Wedin, Rabbit Ears seems to be holding on tight enough that she won’t slip.

Wedin could only hear the sounds of sirens as they blazed underneath the streets.

Eventually, the two stopped, at a rooftop with a peculiar sight on it. Rabbit ears placed them on the rooftop.

Wedin could see a smoking crashed van. Looks to be damaged, but how did a van get on top of a roof?

Rabbit Ears pulled out her Magical Phone, and looked like she was trying to contact someone. Didn’t seem to be working, as she frustratingly tried to contact them over and over again.

“Ms. Himeno… Wake up!” whispered Wedin.

She tried to scoot over towards her teacher, and tried to nudge her awake, but it didn't seem to work.

Wedin focused, and could feel her Magical Phone still within her pocket. If she could just reach it, she could transform again.

Rabbit Ears tied the rope tight. It was nearly impossible to remove the knot. She still had to try though.

"Wedin. I found you,"

She heard a familiar voice, and a gust of wind began blowing around her.

That familiar voice…

"Mei? Mei is that you?" whispered Wedin quietly.

"Yes. Mei is the wind. Mei is invisible, but Mei can speak."

A faint transparent figure of Tepsekemei's face could be seen as it faded in and out of sight, being blown by the wind.

"Cut me loose. Cut Ms. Himeno loose, too."

"Okay."

Without so much as an effort. Mei materialized her hand, and ripped apart the rope tying up Wedin, then she moved on and ripped the rope tying apart Ms. Himeno.

Wedin found her Magical Phone, and with a quick press, a bright light shone in her body, and she transformed.

That was when Rabbit Ears noticed.

As quick as she could, Wedin ran and jumped off the roof.

Rabbit Ears was fast. On all fours, she quickly jumped down, leaps and bounds faster than Wedin could ever be.

Although she had a headstart, a quick look back revealed that Rabbit Ears seems to have a speed advantage.

Can’t run in a straight line. Wedin will have to cut corners. Turning left immediately when Rabbit Ears would least expect it, Wedin braced herself and crashed through a store’s window.

Alarms blared.

Wedin didn’t stop, and found a door to the exit, slammed it open, and continued running.
Rabbit Ears may have been caught off-guard, but she still kept up by taking shortcuts and jumping across obstacles.

“Stop ruining property, you’re only going to make things worse!” yelled Rabbit Ears.

“Then stop *chasing* me!” yelled Wedin back.

Cutting across an alleyway, Wedin continued running, but Rabbit Ears could easily bypass the dumpsters and other trash in the alley.

Wedin saw Rabbit-Ears jump. She was going to pounce her…

…But then a large gust of wind knocked Rabbit Ears back.

Wedin could feel her arms being lifted up by an invisible force. However, Wedin knew who it was immediately.

“Wedin is slow. Mei will help.”

“Ngh… Everyone has their own stamina. Thanks for the help, Mei.”

Rabbit Ears was still chasing them, however, despite Tepsekemei’s apparent speed boost. She tried to reach up to the sky, but could only hover as Wedin hoped Tepsekemei’s fast enough.

“Mei, go *higher*!”

“Mei can’t do that”

“Why not?”

“Because Wedin is too heavy”

“On second thought, keep your thoughts to yourself.”

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 21 Minutes)**

The cold concrete rooftop was all that Hime could feel in her cheeks. When she woke up, there was almost nobody there.

The cold windy air, a smoking crashed van, and a rooftop, all alone.

How did she get here? More importantly, where is everyone?

Then it snapped. Her students. The battle earlier. They were gone, and she had no idea where they went.

She did, however, have her Magical Phone. Transforming into her Magical Girl form, she raced downwards to try and find them.

By now, she had already gotten used to her powers. Swinging from rooftop to rooftop with her magical ribbons, and making pathways that only she could use. It's amazing how fast you could get used to these.

What's more, even if she were to fall, she wouldn't exactly die of falling, thanks to her durability.

As she was zipping through the air, she felt a shock in her body.

Suddenly, her voice couldn't come out, and she felt pain being centered in her face. She found it hard to breath, as if she just hit the vacuum of space.

Coughing blood.

Blurry vision.

Ears popping.

What was this?

Hime used what strength she had to pull herself back towards where she was. Once she was out of the area, she felt like she could actually breathe again.

Her mind began to clear up. Of course, she must've forgotten in the stress.

Toko said that there was a barrier surrounding the city. This must be it. Invisible, but surrounding the city regardless. So touching it can cause that kind of pain, huh?

She really was quarantined here…

Hime tried contacting the students through her Magical Phone. Surely someone must've had it on.

No answer.

There was nothing.

The phone just didn't want to work.

What? Was there a signal issue? Hime didn't think there would be, considering these were supposedly *Magical* Phones, not usual phones. Even so, was the barrier affecting it? That can't be, otherwise she wouldn't be able to use it earlier in the day.

She could still transform, so that was a relief.

How will she contact her students now? Where *are* they? What about her? What if the other Magical Girls find her? How will she defend herself?

So many questions plaguing Hime's mind. So many questions.

Today wasn't even supposed to be like this, but now here she was…

No one to call. No one to contact. All alone. Hunted down by a group she doesn't even know about.

For the first time in her life, Hime felt utterly helpless.

She sat at the edge of the rooftop, quietly wondering how she was going to proceed forward next.

Clank

A small sound from behind her. Distinct wooden noises.

She looked back, and she saw another girl. From her looks, it was another Magical Girl. This one looked threatening. A one-armed, scarfaced ninja.

But the ninja girl simply stared calmly at Hime. Not that Hime would react. She knew well enough that she couldn't possibly match this ninja in a fight, and so fighting would've been useless.

Running would've been useless as well, since Hime thought that she would've just been caught.

Hime had already accepted her fate. But the ninja girl didn't seem to want to attack her. Instead, she went closer, and sat next to her.

Hime didn't know how to react. She just felt anger. Anger at not being able to protect her students. Anger at the situation she's in right now.

She almost cried there. She felt helpless.

"Why are you here?" asked Hime.

"I'm not going to hurt you if that's what you mean."

"That's not what I mean. I'm asking you why you came here."

"I saw you being carried by my friend. Figured I'd follow along just in case."

"I mean, why did you come to this city? Why are you chasing Toko? Why are you causing all this?"

Hearing those words, the ninja girl glanced at her. Despite the scarred left eye, she had a fairly calm expression, and her voice wasn't hostile at all.

"How about this… You tell me about yourself, and I'll answer any questions you want about myself. Deal?" said the ninja girl.

There seemed to be nothing to lose. Hime didn't exactly have much to hide. Maybe she'll learn something by finding out about this ninja girl's team.

With a sigh, Hime nodded.

"Let's start over. My name's Ripple."

“Kuru-Kuru Hime… At least that’s what my phone says.”

The ninja girl nodded and smiled.

“Alright, start at the beginning. How’d you get in this mess?”

How *did* she get in this mess? The last thing Hime remembered that she wanted to do was to get the cleanup committee set up. Now she was on some life-or-death situation, her students are who knows where, and she’s been kidnapped at least once today.

Hime took a deep breath.

“I’m a High School Language teacher. I was supposed to meet with my students to talk about a club… Then this fairy called Toko turned us all into Magical Girls, and she told us about an evil witch chasing her. We got into a fight with her and the girl with rabbit ears, headed out to an apartment, and here I am.”

Ripple nodded silently.

“Evil witch, huh? Heh… She can be a hardass, but evil is putting it too much,” said Ripple.

Ripple looked at the distant stars, and spoke again,

“So, forced into being a Magical Girl and dragged into a fight you didn’t ask for? I’ve been there”

Hime noticed Ripple’s lost left arm.

“Is that where you lost your…”

Ripple glanced at her.

Hime looked away.

“Sorry, I didn’t...”

“It’s fine. Not like I’m hiding it. Yeah. It’s a long story,” said Ripple.

“So, I told you my story. Now it’s your turn, right? Why *did* you come here?” asked Hime.

“We’re looking for… a criminal, to put it lightly”

“A criminal? Toko?”

“Partly. Toko’s a collaborator. There’s someone in the group that we think is a criminal.” Hime’s heart skipped a beat. One of her students? It can’t be. The thought hurt her more than she thought it would.

“D-Do you know who it is?” asked Hime nervously.

“Not yet. That’s why we’re trying to gather up everybody.”

“S-So, you’re like… policemen?”

“Me? No. I’m a volunteer. The others in my team, yeah. You can say that.”

“You’re not… one of them?”

“I work with them, just… not officially. Not yet.”

“Why are you volunteering?”

Ripple was silent for a moment. Hime thought she hit something personal. After a while, Ripple answered,

“To help a friend, who really needs someone to be there for her right now.”

Looks like she probably won’t explain further. It makes sense. Something personal isn’t really something you want to openly share with others.

Hime was surprised. She didn’t expect to get into a friendly conversation, especially not after what happened earlier in the day.

Ripple glanced at her,

“Look. I trust you, and I promise you, none of us were ordered to kill you. Your students will be fine. Come with me, I’ll take you someplace safe.”

Hime pondered for a moment.

Alone, she couldn't really do much. Although she slightly trusts Ripple, she doesn't know how to feel about her teammates.

But perhaps Hime had no choice in the matter.

Accepting whatever awaits her, she nodded.

☆ **Postarie (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 26 Minutes)**

Postarie couldn't contact anybody. Her Magical Phone wouldn't work. Neither could Rain Pou it seems.

Both of them tried to contact whoever may be left, but there was no answer at all.

"Toko, what's going on?" asked Rain Pou.

"I honestly have no idea," replied Toko with a shrug.

The small fairy was still tucked inside Rain Pou's chest pocket. It didn't look like she wanted to do much flying, and she was safe there anyways, being able to hide whenever she felt like it.

Today's been an insane day for Postarie. The highlight of it has to be the black creature, that luckily went away as soon as Postarie touched it.

But now there's no way of actually contacting anyone, and Postarie is alone. The only upside is that she's with Rain Pou.

"You alright there, Postarie?" asked Rain Pou.

Startled, Postarie could only nod while trying to pull a smile. She wasn't exactly okay. She was stressed out and scared. She thought she would've died multiple times during that fight. She rode a flying car. She was almost captured by that ninja girl.

Postarie was trying to hold back tears. All she wanted to do now was cry.

Rain Pou didn't seem easily convinced by Postarie's words either, as she approached her and placed a hand on Postarie's shoulder.

"Hey, Ta-Chan. If you wanna talk to me about something, you *can*, y'know?"

Postarie didn't exactly know what to say, or where to start. Perhaps, if she talked about it with Rain Pou, then she'll feel a bit better about it.

She'll never know until she tries.

"Well… I think I'm just not cut out for this whole Magical Girl thing," said Postarie sheepishly.

"WHAT!? YOU CAN'T JUST *QUIT*!" screamed out Toko as her head popped out of the pocket.

The sudden shouting startled Postarie, and made her even less confident on talking about this kind of stuff.

"Toko, calm *down*. Let me at least talk with her," said Rain Pou, glaring at Toko.

She walked over to Postarie and nodded.

"So, tell me what's up!" said Rain Pou.

"Huh?"

"Why're you feeling down about it?"

"It's just… stressful, I guess."

Rain Pou sat down, and urged Postarie to sit next to her. The both of them sat and watched the night sky.

"I actually thought you'd love it. Having cool powers and being able to do things you couldn't when you were just human," said Rain Pou.

"Well, all that's fun, it's just… I'm not the outgoing type."

"You gotta be more confident in yourself, Ta-Chan!" said Rain Pou grinning.

To be fair, Postarie did believe it was quite fun to have these abilities. She was never able to run as fast as she could.

Despite being deathly afraid of what happened earlier, the whole thing was fairly exciting while she was doing it. Still, she couldn't help but feel like this isn't the life for her.

It looked like Rain Pou *did* enjoy this kind of life, though. That's good for her.

"I'm just not meant for this kind of life, I think," said Postarie. She was nervous. She didn't want to disappoint her friend, nor did she know the right words to say.

"You can help a lot of people y'know? You don't necessarily have to fight. I think we were just unlucky, Ta-Chan."

She's right. Helping people seemed nice. Postarie's powers would be useful if she wants to help someone. Besides, helping someone seems less dangerous than actually fighting people.

"I think I'd like to just help people. That'd be nice," said Postarie.

Rain Pou smiled.

"Alright then! After all this is over, we'll do that, alright?"

"Okay."

"For now let's head back to the apartment. Find out if anyone's there."

Postarie nodded, and the two girls jumped off the roof, making their way back.

When they reached just 3 blocks near the apartment complex, the girls heard sirens and bright lights just ahead.

Both of them stopped in their tracks. They understood what happened.

"Change back. We won't be spotted that way," said Rain Pou.

Postarie agreed, and both of them transformed back to their human forms. Wearing school uniforms as well.

Toko got out of Rain Pou's pockets as she transformed, and once she became Kaori, entered her pockets again.

“Do you think the others are okay?” asked Postarie nervously.

“Maybe. We have to take a closer look.”

The two girls approached the crowd of onlookers as police and firemen were responding on scene.

Although there weren’t many tenants living in the apartments, which is why they chose this place in the first place, there were still some people living in it. More than that, the surrounding buildings still had people as well.

Reporters were also on the scene, interviewing people.

Rain Pou nudged at Postarie, urging her to get a closer look so they can listen in.

They could just barely hear the interviewers asking questions as they passed by them.

“Could you tell us what you saw, sir?”

“It was a *flying* van.”

“Could you elaborate?”

“I really do mean it was flying. It had wings and everything!”

Hearing the exchange, Postarie nervously gulped. She only realized how reckless they were in letting themselves be seen by others.

She didn’t exactly exercise caution, mostly because everything was in the heat of the moment. Now that everything’s died down, however, she realized how much she’s caused.

Even more people were being questioned, and none of the eyewitness reports gave them any calm.

“Saw a rainbow forming outside my window”

“I- I think there was shooting? I heard gunfire, and I didn’t wanna get out”

“Definitely a terrorist bombing. I heard explosions. If it wasn’t a bomb, it’s some kind of rocket launcher. What? No I don’t know *how* they got a bazooka in here”

“There was an earthquake, and I think I saw a ship. Like, one of those pirate ships.”

So many sightings. So many reports. Almost none of them seemed to be good news. The one thing that Postarie did notice though, is that there doesn’t seem to be anyone caught.

So their friends are safe? Hopefully.

What about the other Magical Girls that were after them? Postarie didn’t think they’d be caught, but she wasn’t sure where they are either.

Rain Pou then pulled Postarie’s hand and dragged her somewhere.

“Wha… Kaori, where are we going?”

“Somewhere quiet. I don’t think anyone’s here.”

The two girls walked off quickly away from the scene. Postarie simply followed without question.

A cool breeze washed over the two girls as they sat in a local park, not far from where the apartment is, but far enough that there aren’t any onlookers.

Thanks to being late at night, there was virtually no one at the park as of this moment.

The two girls sat at a nearby bench, mulling over recent events.

“Kaori… Where is everyone?”

“I don’t know. Phone’s not working. They’re not answering either. Toko, you know anything about this?”

Toko popped her head out.

“Like I said. No idea. I don’t even know why it’s not working”

Rain Pou let out a sigh, she looks like she’s given up on trying to find the others. That means it was just the two of them for now.

“Did Captain Grace or Wedin or anyone set up a backup meeting location?” asked Postarie.

“No. Nobody did. But actually, if we can get something that belongs to Grace, you can use your powers to track her down, right?”

“Oh… yeah, that’s useful but… do we have anything?”

“Nope… We’d have to go back. That place is probably a crime scene now, so we can’t do anything about that. Don’t suppose you know where any of them live?”

How would Postarie know that. She never really became friends with them before this.

“No… sorry.”

“Me neither. It’s fine.”

Rain Pou stretched her arms. The two of them were clearly tired, and the night is getting later. At this point, Postarie really wanted a break.

That’s when she noticed someone approaching them.

It was a woman, with a black coat, and what seemed to be a black, wide-brimmed Gainsborough Hat.

Despite her walking calmly towards them, Postarie felt tense when looking at her. There was something about the woman that screamed danger.

Looking beside her, she noticed that Toko had already hid, and Rain Pou noticed the woman as well.

The two girls acted calmly, not really wanting to make any sudden movements.

The woman stopped in front of their bench, had a soft smile, and calmly asked them,

“I assume you two are Magical Girls, no?”

The question caught Postarie off-guard. Who was this woman and why did she suddenly ask a specific question? She already felt like she knew where this is going, but still…

“Don’t worry. I’m also a Magical Girl, as well. Mind if I sit here?” she asked calmly.

Postarie's heartrate increased. Rain Pou silently nodded.

The woman casually took a seat in the middle of both of them. This was getting even more uncomfortable for Postarie.

Suddenly, the woman, in the blink of an eye, caught Rain Pou's hand, reaching for her pocket.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you. I'm not here to kill you. I would've done so if I wanted to. I'm here to talk."

Her hand still gripped Rain Pou's hand. This woman was complete danger.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Mao Pam. May I know yours?"

Postarie didn't know if she should answer. She glanced at Rain Pou. Rain Pou nodded at Postarie, signaling her to do as the woman says for now.

"T-Tatsuko"

"I didn't ask for your real names. Tell me your Magical Girl names."

"Uh… Postarie."

Mao Pam nodded, and glanced at Rain Pou.

"And yours?"

"Rain Pou"

"Postarie and Rain Pou. A pleasure to meet you both. Though, I'd prefer it not be under these unusual circumstances."

The two girls nodded. Postarie did it partly out of fear. For now, it was best to be calm. But how can someone be calm in a situation like this?

She tried as hard as she could to keep her breath steady. This person, Mao Pam, could probably kill them in the blink of an eye.

"From your uniforms, it seems to me like you're High School students, am I correct?"

Again, the two nodded silently.

“You had no prior experience to being Magical Girls before today?”

The two shook their heads.

“You were transformed into a Magical Girl by a small fairy named Toko, is that true?”

The girls nodded.

“But did you know you were tricked by her?”

Silence.

Postarie didn’t answer because she didn’t know what to say. She hadn’t considered the possibility of Toko tricking them. Mostly because what had happened throughout the day only reinforced the fact that Toko was being pursued by someone who’ll stop at nothing to get her.

Not only that, but Mao Pam, despite this apparent politeness, had an aura of death surrounding her, like she’s someone bloodthirsty. Every instinct in Postarie’s body is telling her to run away.

Two possibilities exist,

Toko is lying, in which case Mao Pam isn’t evil. However, if Toko is lying, why does it seem like everything she says is true?

If Mao Pam is lying, then everything is as Postarie believed. But then, why would Mao Pam not kill them immediately?

Glancing at Rain Pou, Postarie tried to find Toko, who was still hiding in Rain Pou’s chest pocket. Seems like she’s not coming out anytime soon, and for a good reason too.

“Hm, speechless. Interesting. Either you know, or you were shocked. I understand your position. A woman comes out to you, tells you she’s a Magical Girl, knows about your secrets, and caught you off-guard,” said Pam while smiling.

Sweat formed on Postarie’s forehead. Despite the cold air of Autumn, this situation has made her tense up.

Pam continued,

“I’d like to offer my protection, in exchange, I’d like some information about you two and Toko.”

Postarie didn’t know what to say. She’s relying on Rain Pou, but even she’s speechless right now.

“Repond!”

“Y-Yes!”

“Yes!”

“Excellent, I’m glad you both agree.”

The intensity of Pam’s orders caused an instinctive reaction in both the girls. Their safest response, to them, was to agree.

They still have no idea what’s about to happen, and they have no idea what kind of deal they just agreed on.

☆ **Captain Grace (Remaining Time: 17 Hours, 59 Minutes)**

“We screwed up,” said Grace.

“I know that. We shouldn’t think too much about it,” replied Funny Trick.

The two Magical Girls stood at a rooftop overlooking the sea. Far from the apartment. They had escaped just immediately as soon as they heard the distant noises of sirens coming close.

Since then, Grace hadn’t bothered summoning her ship, for fear of getting attention.

“Shouldn’t think too much- Kayo, there’s *Police*! The damn *police* are coming to *my* apartment! I heard sirens! The fire department, police sirens, the whole *block* is lookin’ at it!”

“Umi, we can worry about that later!”

“Later!? That’s my *apartment*!”

“I know, but as much as I don’t want to seem like I’m ignoring that fact, we still have to find the others!”

“Good luck with that. My phone doesn’t work for some reason”

“Neither is mine”

“Well that’s just *fantastic*. What’s Plan B?”

Funny Trick closed her eyes and shrugged. “We never had a Plan B.”

Captain Grace felt anger. She couldn’t believe the situation she was in right now. Isolated, nowhere to go, and no information whatsoever.

She kicked a nearby wall, the strength of her kick creating a small hole in it.

“Umi, calm down!” yelled Funny Trick.

“Wedin shouldn’t have been the leader, we could’ve avoided all this,” complained Grace.

“This is *not* the time.”

“Then *when*? She was too busy trying to teach everyone how Magical Girls worked, she didn’t have a chance to make a backup plan!”

“And *we* were in your ship drinking tea, we’re all at fault here!”

Grace couldn’t argue with that logic, but she was still furious. Who else was she supposed to be mad to?

The whole situation seemed like there was nothing that Grace could do. She hated being powerless. Being powerless was what she was a long time ago. She worked hard so she could actually have power and control over her life, not the other way around.

Frustrated, Grace screamed and threw her Magical Phone away.

The phone bounced off the pavement and entered an open sewer grate.

Funny Trick rose up, materialized a piece of cloth from her outfit, grabbed some stray pebbles on the roof, covered them up, and uncovered them to reveal Grace's Magical Phone.

"Hey. This is yours," said Funny Trick, handing the phone over to Grace.

"What's the damn point? Crappy thing doesn't work anyway."

"Umi, throwing this away is like giving up. You're not the kind of person to give up, are you?" asked Funny Trick, hand still offering the phone.

Reluctantly, Grace grabbed the Magical Phone from Funny Trick's hand, and she let out a deep sigh.

"Well, what do you think we should do?"

"Make our own Plan B. Set up somewhere. Somewhere they might eventually try to find us."

Grace thought for a moment. A place that's not too crowded, big enough to house them, and could probably fit her ship.

"Oh, there's an abandoned warehouse in town!" said Grace happily.

"An… abandoned warehouse."

"Yeah! Like those stories where they set up in an abandoned warehouse or building. Nobody's home, and it can be our little base!" said Grace enthusiastically, the energy coming back to her.

Seeing Grace smile must have triggered something in Funny Trick, as she looked warm and happy once more.

Funny Trick chuckled, and looked over at the horizon.

"Well. Lead the way then, *Captain Grace*!"

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 15 Hours, 52 Minutes)

"Check her," ordered Mana.

7753 equipped her goggles and scanned over the ribbon ballerina girl. Her name was Kuru-Kuru Hime. Real Name, Nozomi Himeno. Occupation, Language Arts Teacher at Namiyama High School. Magical Girls killed, none.

7753 sighed a breath of relief. “She’s clean.”

“We’ll have questions for you later,” said Mana to Hime, who’s still nervously scared about this whole situation.

After talking with her, Mana approached Ripple with an angry expression.

“Why didn’t you contact us? It’s been an hour.”

“Phone’s not working, not sure why,” replied Ripple.

“Yours too? None of ours is working. Are we being sabotaged?”

“Maybe. You should know that *her* phone’s not working either,” said Ripple, glancing at Kuru-Kuru Hime.

Mana groaned and massaged her head, trying to make sense of what’s going on.

“What the hell is happening. We’re short two people and none of our stuff works. Hana and Pam are still out there.”

Mana was frustrated. She had been for a while now, and 7753 believed she knew the cause.

It was Hana. Mana is very close with Hana, and the fact that she’s not here and Mana couldn’t contact her must’ve put extreme stress in her head.

“U-Um, excuse me,” said a voice in the corner of the room. It was Kuru-Kuru Hime.

All three of them glanced at her.

“Will… Will my students be safe?” asked Hime.

Mana sighed and walked over to her,

“I’m going to tell you straight. They could be facing some serious charges for resisting a Land of Magic official *and* fighting us twice.”

Hime looked distraught. Ripple walked over beside Mana and grabbed her shoulder,

“Mana. Go easy on her, she’s been through a lot.”

“I’d rather tell her the facts than give her false hope, Ripple. Besides, we have more important matters to attend to, like finding out where the rest of our team is.”

“We also need to find the other students,” said Ripple.

“As I said. A *lot* of work ahead of us.”

As the two of them continued talking, 7753 noticed that her goggles are displaying some letters. The letters formed into words, which formed into sentences.

Strange, 7753 didn’t remember writing anything, nor did she know that her goggles could be used to write.

Unless…

Her mentor is typing something to her through her goggles?

Makes sense, since her Magical Phone doesn’t work, her mentor must know, and is trying to relay information some other way.

7753. I need you to relay this information out loud. Urgent news just came to my attention. Your team needs to know this.

7753 gulped.

“Guys. My higher ups are trying to communicate with me. I think you should all listen in to this.”

Mana and Ripple both looked curiously at 7753, wondering what she’d say next.

7753 focused on the message appearing through her goggles, and slowly, she read them out loud to her team.

“A few hours ago, I received a message… There was a breakout in the UK prison facility… Four Magical Girls got out. Led by one named… Pythie Frederica.”

Ripple’s eyes lit up.

7753 continued on,

“Among others, they also broke out several more prisoners… Pukin and Sonia Bean… Highly dangerous. Pythie is also accompanied by a Magical Girl known as Tot Pop.”

Mana closed her eyes and shook her head.

7753 still continued,

“Use caution, because the last I’ve heard of them… They’ve… Entered the barrier?”

7753 read the last line with a look of shock and confusion.

“What!?” asked Mana.

“Frederica’s dangerous. She’s bad news, Mana. We should pay attention to this,” said Ripple.

“You know her?”

“In a way, yes. We’ve had history.”

Mana stepped over to Ripple, face-to-face, with a threatening look on her.

“If you had anything to do with this at all, I swear…”

“Step off, Mana. Frederica’s no friend of mine,” said Ripple, not losing a beat.

“How did you know her then?” demanded Mana.

Ripple sighed, and spoke,

“After Clamberry’s tests. Snow White and I started working together for a time. We trained, we undertook our own missions. Pythie was a rogue Magical Girl. Clamberry supporter. One of the first ones we actually caught. After her, Snow decided to split.”

“So you’ve arrested Pythie? She just *happens* to come to the barrier, and you just *happen* to be sent to our Investigation team? I don’t buy it. How did she even get inside in the first place? The barrier’s not open yet!”

“Her powers can bypass that. Without going into a lot of details, it’s a form of teleportation.”

“Great… She could be anywhere then. Dammit,” said Mana as she rubbed her forehead in frustration.

Then, Mana pointed a finger at 7753,

“And *you*! All of our phones are dead, yet your goggles work and you’re talking to your boss. I don’t know whether you’re a part of this or not, but don’t think for a *second* that I’m not keeping an eye on you.”

“Step *off*, Mana,” said Ripple, standing between Mana and 7753.

“So, I’m the bad guy now? Fine. We’ll formulate a new plan. Our priority is to find the Assassin, then we’ll handle Frederica,” said Mana.

“Bad idea. Frederica’s smarter and more dangerous than you give her credit for,” said Ripple.

“Our job here is to find a killer, not handle others. That takes priority before her.”

“Frederica’s not just going to stand there. She came here for a reason. We’re still short two people. Mana… Hana’s still out there. She doesn’t *know*.”

Hearing Ripple’s words, Mana’s eyes widened. The realization sank in.

Hana doesn’t know about Pythie’s team arriving in the barrier. She’s out there with no one to look after her. She’s in danger.

“Hana… Shit. Okay, new plan. We focus our efforts on finding her and Pam. My wand can detect traces of magic, but it’s going to be hard finding one person. You. Ballerina. Stay with us, do *not* try to escape. Ripple and 7753, you’ll also need to stay together, since we can’t contact each other. Is that clear?”

Ripple, 7753, and Kuru-Kuru Hime all nodded.

7753 noticed more messages transmitting through her goggles. Nervously, she spoke up again,

“Guys… There’s more messages. Um… You should all focus on looking for Mao Pam. She’ll be useful in defeating Pythie’s group, thanks to her past.”

“Past, what past?” asked Mana.

7753 continued reading,

“Mao Pam is hiding something from you. Something that can be useful in fighting Pythie’s team. Mao Pam is… Clamberry’s mentor?”

Ripple’s fist involuntarily tightened at the mention of Clamberry. Her eyes looked furious, though she said nothing.

Mana took a deep breath, “Today just keeps getting better and better, huh? Well, Ripple? Still think I’m the bad guy?”

☆ **Mao Pam (Remaining Time: 16 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

Someone managed to destroy one of Pam’s wings.

After chasing the genie for a while, eventually she disappeared into the wind and retreated. Pam decided not to give chase, since she knew somewhere in the outskirts, there was a barrier stopping the genie from escaping.

Instead, she ordered her wings to return to her.

One of them returned to her with white feathers, flying towards her at high speed. Someone’s magic perhaps?

The other didn’t return at all.

The thought that someone managed to defeat Pam’s wings made her excited. A worthy opponent to fight.

Pam separated one of her wings, and from that half, increased the length so that she again has 4 black wings.

Her ability allows her to make more, but her upper limit is 4 distinct wings. That’s just how this power works, and Pam has to work within its rulesets.

The first thing Pam did was to rush back towards the apartment.

As she was flying across the wide open B-City sky, her sharp eyes picked up two glowing lights. Transformations of Magical Girls, hidden within an alley.

From the alley came two High School girls, running all the way to their apartment. This might be her chance to talk to one of them.

After a few moments, the two girls retreated to the park. Pam landed, and had her wings transform to become her coat, and another to become a hat, hiding her horns.

As much as Pam enjoyed a good fight, these two were amateurs. They were new Magical Girls. Normally Pam didn't deal with them much, but these girls were seriously scared out of their lives.

Newbies. It's been a while since Pam actually felt the need to protect someone. Perhaps she can gain some information as well.

Despite her love for battle, Mao Pam was someone that respected honor. She longed for a good fight, and established herself within the Land of Magic as a powerful individual.

Her reason for finding stronger opponents, a curiosity that wanted to be sated.

Self-improvement, and finding out the ultimate peak of a Magical Girl's ability. Despite the fact that being a Magical Girl involved getting a slightly random unique power, Magical Girls also have to train themselves to adapt to any situation.

It's this kind of adaptation that Mao Pam longed for.

She would challenge stronger Magical Girls, but leave the weaker ones alone.

It turns out she wasn't alone in this pursuit of strength. She established herself as someone who could teach others to become stronger, and so many Magical Girls looking to improve themselves came to her.

One of them was particularly interesting. Partly because she always offered a good fight.

She was approached by an elf girl. Her name was Clamberry.

Sharing her passion for finding the strongest opponents, Pam agreed to train her. Together, the two continued to spar and fight each other, becoming stronger and improving themselves with every match.

As time went on, however, Pam noticed that Clamberry's way of thinking was different from her.

Pam wanted to become strong because she wanted to know the limits of strength itself.

Clamberry wanted to become strong because it seems that it's the only reason for her to live.

After graduating from her mentorship, Pam gave her the title of "Forest Musician." Clamberry's used that title ever since.

However, it's then that Pam began to hear what Clamberry had done after her training.

Clamberry had become a test administrator, and after years of no contact, Clamberry's activities were finally brought to light.

She'd been conducting battle royales. Death games. In an attempt to find the strongest opponents, she's dragged each and every other new Magical Girl into the equation.

Her lust for battle was out of control.

Although Pam felt a tinge of loss, she still couldn't feel full sympathy for the lives lost during Clamberry's tests. Perhaps because she'd become desensitized to fighting and death.

But here, and now… There were two newbies who were troubled. Pam can gain info on her target, Toko, and in return, she may even be able to protect them.

"Sabbath".

As Pam said those words, two of her wings transformed into fur jackets, and wore themselves around the two girls.

"What is this?" asked Rain Pou.

"Protection. My wings can keep you safe. Now, let's talk," said Pam, smiling warmly.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 16 Hours, 11 Minutes)**

“The sea! We should head to the sea!” said Wedin as she was being carried by Tepsekemei, floating through the streets, with Rabbit Ears keeping up behind them.

“Why the sea?” asked Tepsekemei.

“Because she’ll have a harder time catching us if we swim! We can lose her there.”

“Cannot reach the sea. Mei has tried. It hurts”

“What? What do you mean it hurts?”

“When Mei was fighting the horned lady. Mei escaped by flying really high. Then Mei hit something invisible. It was painful. Mei doesn’t want to do it anymore.”

An invisible wall?

The barrier.

Wedin only just remembered that they were trapped in B-City for the time being. This means they have no choice.

Rabbit Ears won’t give up. Magical Girls don’t run out of stamina easily, and this could go on forever, but Rabbit Ears will eventually catch up. Her or her friends.

Meaning, they’ll have to fight.

“Mei, can you take her?”

“…Maybe.”

“Find somewhere wide and quiet.”

“Mei doesn’t know the city.”

“There’s an abandoned building nearby. The district’s poor and there’s nobody there. Follow my instructions!”

“Okay.”

Wedin knew where she was going. An abandoned warehouse, used to be a place where a local factory stored their goods. It was abandoned several years ago, and B-City being B-City, nobody has gotten around to actually demolishing it.

Low witnesses, low noise, a good battlefield if they have to fight.

Wedin led Tepsekemei towards the shortest path, zipping through alleyways and floating through bridges and intersections.

When they finally reached the warehouse, they found the unexpected company of two other people.

“Whoa, what’s the rush?” said a blue-shirted pirate girl.

“Captain Grace!” yelled out Wedin.

Tepsekemei released Wedin, looked at Grace and Funny Trick, and spoke,

“Enemy is coming. Be ready!” said Tepsekemei as she dissipated into the air.

Rabbit Ears arrived at the scene shortly. She stood up, and looked over the 3 Magical Girls in front of her.

Captain Grace smirked and walked in front of the group.

“Oh, hey there, Rabbit Ears! We meet again!”

Rabbit Ears nodded,

“Still going to fight me after what happened last time?”

“Oh, you bet! I’m ready for Round 2! Are you?”

“This will be so much easier for everyone involved if you’d just listen to me and come peacefully.”

“Uhh… That’s a *no*.”

Captain Grace's voice was loud, boisterous, and boastful. She was a musclehead at its finest. Wedin couldn't help but feel second-hand embarrassment from seeing this display.

Still, Grace was the best fighter out of all them.

"So you're going to gang up on me and attack me. Why can't you guys just listen?" said Rabbit Ears as she got into a fighting stance.

Grace pulled out her cutlass, and pointed it directly at Rabbit Ears, making a distinct *shink* noise as it glinted in the moonlight.

"Oh no, it's not gonna be 4-on-1 today! It's just *you* and *me*! Think you can take me on?" she said as she grinned.

"I'll be sure to make it fast and painless," said Rabbit Ears.

Wedin noticed something coming from the warehouse. A strange shimmer in the air. Like what you would see when the sun is at its peak.

But it's nighttime, and the shimmer was there.

What was this?

From the shimmer, walked a woman, clad in an aristocratic dress, an orange sword, and orange hair.

She had a beautiful form, yet she also projected a murderous aura in her eyes.

The woman clapped loudly, and laughed. She laughed like a beast, not caring for a minute what the world thinks.

Then she spoke, but she spoke in a language that Wedin didn't understand.

Some words were familiar, but this was clearly another language… English? And even then, this was a strange accent that Wedin wasn't familiar with.

The other Magical Girls noticed this woman too.

Coming after the shimmer, was another one. With a light brown hoodie, long black hair, horns from the hoodie, and a crystal ball in her hand.

This one spoke in a language Wedin understood,

“My apologies. My friend here, Shogun Pukin, is a foreigner. She doesn’t speak Japanese. Allow me to translate for her,” she said as she stood beside the other woman, named Pukin.

Pukin began speaking. Again, in an unfamiliar language. The other woman chuckled, and translated.

“Shogun Pukin has said that she found this display entertaining. She was actually rooting for the pirate. She has skill. Fortunately, she’s here to make things interesting. She asks that you please not run away, as she is much more capable than the rabbit at catching you, and she will definitely kill you if you run.”

Wedin’s heart skipped a beat.

Who were these two? Where did they come from? What’s going on.

Captain Grace and Rabbit Ears were both shocked and confused as well.

So these two weren’t with Rabbit Ears?

A third party?

Wedin and Funny Trick stood side by side, Captain Grace and Rabbit Ears facing off in the distance, with Pukin and this other woman watching them.

Pukin spoke something. Despite it being English, Wedin understood enough to understand what she said.

This will be fun.

Chapter 7
Witch Hunt

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 15 Hours, 22 Minutes)**

A patchwork dressed girl and a rockstar looking girl showed up behind the fortune teller and Pukin.

4 of them. 4 of Wedin's team. 1 Rabbit Eared girl.

9 people in the docks.

The air was tense. Nobody moved.

Pukin gently stroked her sword. A French rapier, orange in color. The patchwork dress girl, pale in white, was smiling besides her. The rockstar was also grinning, with a large electric guitar.

Funny Trick was next to Wedin, and Tepsekemei was somewhere, but hidden.

Grace and Rabbit Ears were facing off, but neither have started to move.

The air was tense. Nobody moved.

Wedin was the leader. She should have a plan. Think of a plan…

Looking at Pukin, she had eyes that screamed murder. She was different than Rabbit Ears. With Rabbit Ears, when they fought her, they didn't feel like they were in danger, despite her ability to fight.

Against Pukin, the feeling of dread remained, and there was a haunting sensation that they might die.

What does death feel like?

Is there an afterlife? Is there nothing? Will Wedin feel anything?

She was scared. She didn't want to die.

Pukin laughed again. She said something out loud. The fortune teller translated,

"Shogun Pukin is wondering why you're all just standing around. She hopes that she didn't interrupt anything," said the fortune teller.

Captain Grace moved. Faster than you could blink.

"That's enough!" screamed Grace.

She engaged Pukin, cutlass ready. Pukin casually blocked the incoming strike by Grace. The two were locked in blades.

Wedin could see Pukin's eyes light up with a fire of a murderer. Pukin was smiling at Grace's sudden attack. Wedin could tell that she wanted this.

Captain Grace was making a huge mistake.

The two swordsmen clashed, both of them trading blows. Captain Grace was fast on her feet, but Pukin's elegant swordsmanship showed.

The match only lasted for a while, however, as Pukin found an opening and kneed Grace in the stomach.

Stunned, Pukin then grabbed Captain Grace's head, rushed towards the warehouse, and slammed it towards the wall.

She wasn't done, as she slammed it over and over, until she finally gave a huge kick that drove Grace through the wall itself.

Captain Grace still stood, groggy, but still standing. She charged at Pukin, and Pukin stepped backwards while parrying every strike.

At the meantime, the fortune-teller and the rockstar approached Rabbit Ears. Both of them smiled, and the rockstar rushed over to Rabbit Ears.

The two of them engaged in combat for only a short moment, as Rabbit Ears got on all fours and ran away.

The fortune-teller and the rockstar continued to chase her.

Now there was only 2 enemies. Wedin's team outnumbered them, but was it really an advantage.

Neither Funny Trick nor Wedin moved as the fight with Grace and Pukin continued to escalate in front of them.

Pukin smashed the hilt of her sword to Grace's head, blocking any attempt at a slash from Captain Grace. The patchwork girl watching in the corner.

Both Funny and Tepsekemei stood still. Wedin understood why. This is the kind of feeling you would get if you knew a wrong move could result in your death.

This kind of feeling was the feeling you get if you knew you were in danger.

Now Wedin understood. The others that were after them. They were fighting them, but they didn't exhibit that deadly feeling.

Pukin, and her group, they were killers.

"Grace… Run!" blurted out Wedin.

Pukin kicked Captain Grace as she stumbled across the pavement.

"I'm not… running from a fight!" said Grace as she stood up and charged at Pukin again.

If Captain Grace continues, she'll die. Why wouldn't she listen? Wedin was the leader of the group, so Captain Grace should listen.

They all voted her as the leader.

They all agreed to have her lead them.

Wait…

…They all agreed.

A vote is a contract between the voters and the one voted. They agreed to follow Wedin's lead no matter what.

Which means…

Wedin breathed heavily, and after gaining her composure, she used every bit of her voice to shout out,

"Everyone! As your leader! I order you to *run*!"

Captain Grace's eyes widened. She parried a blow from Pukin, and Grace jumped high towards the warehouse rooftop.

Besides her, a gust of wind flew towards Grace's direction, and Funny Trick ran, following Captain Grace.

Wedin's magic worked. They agreed. A vote is a promise. They can't break that promise so long as Wedin uses her authority as the leader of the group.

Pukin shouted something to the pale patchwork girl, and pointed towards Wedin's friends. The patchwork girl nodded and jumped towards the roof, chasing them.

Pukin then turned her attention to Wedin. She walked slowly towards Wedin, rapier drawn out, eyes hungry for blood.

Wedin felt a chill in her spine. As a Magical Girl, the cool breeze wouldn't bother her, so this chill was abnormal. This was the fear that she had felt.

That fear was walking straight towards her.

"Wait! I surrender! I'm not a threat!"

It might not work, or it might. Maybe she can still somehow be reasoned with. Wedin would never win in a fight with Pukin, not after what she did to Captain Grace. Without Tepsekemei's help, she can't outrun her either.

Pukin continued walking. That's right, she couldn't understand her Japanese.

What's the English word…

"*Surrender*! *Surrender*!" said Wedin as she slowly backed away.

With those words, Pukin stopped in her tracks. The look on her face looked like she was genuinely shocked. Was she expecting Wedin to fight?

A smile appeared on Pukin's face. It was sinister, a single curl on a side of her lips. She pointed the rapier at Wedin, and slowly walked towards her.

The rapier was now only 5 cm away from Wedin's throat. Pukin chuckled. Wedin didn't dare move.

After a few tense seconds, Pukin swiftly moved her rapier in a slash. Wedin instinctively closed her eyes, but only felt some pain in her arm.

It was only a prick, a small slash, a small bit of pain, right in her arm, where the sword slashed her.

Pukin chuckled, and wiped the small stain of blood from her blade. She began speaking again.

At first, Wedin didn't understand, but then slowly, the words made sense. This wasn't Japanese, this was still English.

Wedin could understand English…

"…should be able to understand me right about now. Well? Do you?" asked Pukin as she sheathed her rapier.

"I.. yes. I… understand you. Thank you."

Wedin was speaking English. She was speaking it fluently, with a fluent accent. It was something she didn't expect. How did she learn?

What was that rapier?

Pukin turned around to Wedin and nodded,

"Good. You're probably wondering how you understood me, hm, Girl? It's my sword, you see. A hit from it allows me to… alter… your mind."

Alter minds? Mind control?

"I can make you learn any language I understand. Don't worry too much about the mind altering bit," she said with a grin.

There are more important things to worry about then mind control.

"Oh, one more thing. I tire of calling you 'Girl'. Tell me, girl. What's your name?" asked Pukin.

"My name? It's Wedin"

"Wedin? A play on 'Wedding'? Such a good name choice. I applaud you," she said while clapping her hands together.

Wedin felt a strange sense of approval when she heard the compliment.

"Now that we've properly met, Wedin. I trust that you wouldn't betray my trust? You wouldn't *lie* to me, or backstab me, would you?"

Why would Wedin betray Pukin's trust? There was no reason to do that.

Wedin shook her head.

"Wonderful! Such a good girl! Keep this up and you'll earn a reward from your Shogun. Would you like that?"

A reward?

A reward sounds very nice. Wedin would love that. She smiled and answered,

"I'd… I'd love a reward, Shogun Pukin."

"Wonderful! Then come with me, and you will receive a *feast* fit for kings! A feast fit for a Shogun and her loyal vassal… So long as you remember, Wedin…"

Pukin said, turning to face Wedin.

Her presence filled Wedin with awe, the Shogun in front of her was something magnificent. A figure of beauty, grace, and power.

"…I, Shogun Pukin, am your everything," said Pukin with a smile, as she turned around and walked away.

Wedin followed Shogun Pukin.

Shogun Pukin was someone she wanted to become like.

Shogun Pukin deserved her every attention.

Shogun Pukin's words are law.

Shogun Pukin is her everything.

☆ **Captain Grace (Remaining Time: 15 Hours, 15 Minutes)**

Captain Grace ran. She ran as fast as she could. She ran as far away from the warehouse as possible.

That swordswoman, Pukin, didn't chase her at all.

Jumping from rooftop to rooftop, Captain Grace was flanked by Funny Trick on her right, and Tepsekemei, zooming through the air on her left.

Captain Grace didn't want to run, but when Wedin ordered her to, she was compelled to run. Something in her body gave in, and she ran.

That was a coward's way out.

"Umi! She's behind us!" yelled out Funny Trick.

Grace took a look back, and saw a pale white girl, running with her arms to her side. Black haze was emanating from her entire body as she chased them.

Captain Grace had to protect Funny Trick.

She had to protect Kayo.

She still felt compelled to run, but she can still control the direction she ran in. Grace dived down to the streets below, and the patchwork girl followed her.

Good. They were far away from Funny Trick now.

If there's one thing Grace wanted to protect more than her own pride, it was Kayo Nemura. She was there when Grace was alone.

Elementary school. Umi Shihabara was mostly feared at school. Thanks to her standing up to anyone that dared to stand up to her.

Not a lot of people approached Umi, and that was fine for her, because Umi preferred people who weren't afraid of her.

It was that day at the library that Umi met Kayo.

Umi had been browsing the books at the school library, looking for fantasy books that interested her. That's where she found the book, *The Robber Hotzenplotz*.

She loved the adventurous style of the book, and the fact that although it was set in a realistic location, it had fantastical elements like a sorcerer!

One day, a girl approached her and wanted to read the book. That girl was Kayo. Kayo loved the book for the clever plots that the characters made.

That was when Umi felt like Kayo would be a perfect friend for her.

The two read the book almost every day. They would spend every moment of their time together.

Whenever they separated, Umi wished she could play with Kayo a bit longer. Kayo was her partner-in-crime.

Kayo was her best friend.

Since then, Umi's been close with Kayo, always asking her to play, and always protecting her from any threat that might happen.

Whenever a bully comes to Kayo, Umi would be there to protect her friend.

Whenever there's a threat to Kayo, Umi would be there to protect her friend.

No matter what.

Kayo is in danger.

Umi had to protect her friend.

Captain Grace ran through the night streets, and as she looked back, she saw the figure of the patchwork girl.

Her face was pale, and she had a smile. She enjoyed the chase. She enjoyed the hunt. At her speed, she would close in on Grace in an instant.

It was a scary sight, because it felt like she was being chased by an actual monster. There was nothing in those eyes of the patchwork girl but the hunger for killing.

Grace trusted her instincts and ran as fast as possible.

But there might be a way.

There could be a way to actually stop her. She just had to be able to time it.

The timing has to be perfect.

A bit closer…

A bit closer…

A bit closer…

Now!

Captain Grace used her Magical Skill, she used the power that she learnt how to use before. The gigantic pirate ship appeared above the patchwork girl, and instantly made a large slamming noise as it crashed through the pavement.

The impact made Grace's body fly away as the dust from the pirate ship blew throughout the streets.

She looked up, and she cheered. A success! She didn't need to run anymore, as she didn't feel like she was in danger.

Tepsekemei flew down towards Grace, helping her stand up. Funny Trick was watching from the rooftops above.

Captain Grace had saved everyone. She had saved Funny Trick's life. She had saved Kayo.

But wait…

A strange black dot spread across the hull of the ship, as it became larger and larger. It spread, until finally the ship's wooden exterior simply turned into nothing.

A small hole in a huge ship, but one in which the patchwork girl was standing in. A hole that manifested from the center of the ship towards the outside.

Tepsekemei charged the patchwork girl, but the girl simply swatted Mei away in one backhand. Smiling, the girl went straight for Captain Grace.

Grace reacted instinctively, throwing a stiletto at her. The patchwork girl caught it, and the stiletto turned into black haze and disappeared.

The girl tackled Grace and pinned her to a wall. Then, she gently touched Captain Grace's face, as the girl grinned and smiled.

Darkness crept across Captain Grace's vision.

Her senses became numb.

She couldn't see. She couldn't feel anything. She couldn't hear anything.

Umi thought she would've been a hero. After all of this, maybe she'd have her own adventure book. The Adventures of Captain Grace, with Funny Trick.

She wanted to protect Kayo, but she failed to do that.

I'm sorry Kayo…

She couldn't think thoughts anymore. Captain Grace felt nothing.

Darkness took her.

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 15 Hours, 15 Minutes)**

A girl with rabbit ears, running on all fours.

Presumably, she's from the Land of Magic. Considering her experience seems to be far more capable than the others.

She also wasn't as scared as the others when Pythie's team showed up. Also, she seemed to be engaged in a fight with the pirate, meaning she wasn't on their side.

Pythie tried to remember. There were so many names and faces in the Land of Magic. Luckily, her rabbit ears may make it easier.

Not a lot of Magical Girls exhibit animal-like qualities. Magical Girls often exhibit personality traits of these animals.

For example, dog-like Magical Girls will often act dog-like. The same can be said of Rabbit Ears. Running on all fours, jumping higher than most Magical Girls, she's exhibited rabbit-like qualities.

Magical Girl transformations often have these side-effects. Something Pythie learned from being a Human Resources member.

But this Magical Girl was not from Human Resources, so Pythie will have to try and expand her knowledge.

Focus. The Land of Magic would try to find the assassin hidden in a city. Meaning Pythie can narrow it down not to the heavy hitters, but to the trackers.

Who would they send to an operation like this? The Examination Division. The policemen and investigators.

With a narrower pool, Pythie could focus on a select few people.

Ah…

Could she be… Hana Gekokujo?

From memory, Pythie recalled that Hana was a high ranking Land of Magic officer. She was usually in charge of raids and undercover missions.

A raid on a rogue Magical Girl operation, or even just a minor raid on illegal human activities in general. However, Hana would also be assigned to investigation missions because of her top-notch tracking skills.

Her powers were to increase the 5 senses.

Now who was her partner? She had a partner. Why didn't Pythie remember? Oh, yes… It was because her partner wasn't a Magical Girl.

Her name was Mana. Hana was particularly close with Mana, as Pythie remembered that they would usually be assigned missions with each other.

Mana was a Mage, so she shouldn't be heading out to the human world on field duty, unless she really wants to be with Hana.

Was Mana assigned here?

Pythie didn't know, but there was a high possibility she was. Why? Because Mana would force herself to be assigned here. Mana would be that kind of person.

This was all hypothetical, as the information wasn't confirmed yet. Pythie had to confirm. Information is power. The more she knew, the more she can use it to her advantage.

As she and Tot Pop raced across the rooftops to chase Hana, Pythie approached Tot Pop.

"That's Hana Gekokujo. Her ability can overload your senses. Stay close to her but be careful, Tot. Is your little group ready?"

Tot Pop nodded, "Everyone's in position, Master Frederica."

“Good. Now, we take Hana,”

Pythie noticed Hana’s ears twitching. So she heard the conversation. Her hearing skills can be that good. Noted.

Neither Pythie nor Tot Pop could hope to catch Hana. She was simply too fast. Even if they did, they can’t fight Hana, as Hana is too skilled.

Pythie wasn’t a fool. She knew her limits. She just had to find another way.

Hana could hear her, so Pythie shouldn’t even bother screaming. With a calm voice, as she ran across the rooftops, Pythie called out to Hana,

“Hana!”

Hana’s ears twitched again. She registered that.

“Hana… I know you can hear me. Do tell me, how is Mana doing? I heard B-City is lovely this time of year!”

Pythie was shotgunning. A term used by cold readers. By asking a variety of questions that synched with her target, Pythie was hoping to elicit a response from Hana.

Key things include mentioning Mana, and mentioning B-City. Whether or not Mana is in B-City is irrelevant. This question will no doubt elicit *some* kind of response.

If Mana isn’t in B-City, then the question would seem like Pythie taunting her. If she is, however…

Hana stopped in her tracks.

A success?

Pythie quickly headed within a few meters away. Close-by was Tot Pop besides her.

Hana looked over at Pythie and Tot Pop, expression full of anger.

“How did you know about Mana being here?”

So Mana *is* in B-City. That confirms that the Examination Division is here. What about the barrier?

The barriers are usually conducted by the Foreign Affairs Division, but theoretically, anyone with the right skill *could* make it.

Right now, Pythie had to know something else. Did the Investigation team know who the assassin was?

“So rude. I’ve come to help you find the assassin, Hana”

“You think I couldn’t hear your conversation with your little apprentice there?”

“My! Perceptive ears!”

“You didn’t answer my question. How did you know about Mana?”

“Mana and I go way back. I was also part of the Land of Magic, you know? I still offer my help with the assassin if you’re looking for her.”

Pythie redirected the question back.

Secretly, she took out a lock of hair. This one belonged to one of Tot Pop’s army men. As Tot Pop is a leader of a military resistance, they had access to a wide array of weapons.

Pythie wound the hair on her right arm’s finger. On her crystal ball, was the area of the armory. Weapons, guns, and of course, a girl in a gas mask.

Hana spoke back,

“Are you taking me for an idiot? Thinking I’d accept your help after your conversation? Underestimating me is a bad idea.”

Accept help. Means that she hasn’t caught the assassin, probably. Meaning whoever it is, she’s still hiding. So the assassin may not be with the Investigation Team.

Her words are far too vague to confirm, though. For now, that’s what Pythie will go with.

“You still haven’t answered my question. Did you do anything to Mana? Are you responsible for the Magical Phone blackout?” asked Hana.

Magical Phone blackout? Pythie hadn’t bothered checking. There was a blackout? That complicates things.

Pythie zoomed in with her crystal ball, went to the section with grenades. Hiding her left arm, she put it inside her crystal ball, unpinned the grenade, and slowly pulled it out.

Tot Pop lightly glanced at her, and softly nodded.

“Maybe. Maybe not. I won’t take you for a fool, Hana, and I suggest you do the same to me. You’ll never know what might happen,” said Pythie with a smile.

“If you touch Mana, I swear-”

“Tot, *now*!”

Pythie threw the grenade forwards, and Tot Pop strummed her guitar as loudly as possible. The large note of the guitar speeding to hit Hana, and the grenade lobbing itself towards her.

Hana reacted fast. She jumped away, but the blast from the grenade and the note from Tot Pop both launched her and hit her back, sending her plummeting to the ground.

Tot Pop thought fast, and she ran down towards Hana, who was scrambling to run away.

Tot Pop strummed her guitar as loud as she can, and the sound caused Hana to scream in pain. She must have been increasing her senses as usual.

Pythie took out a lock of Tot Pop’s hair, and her crystal ball showed Tot chasing a weakened Hana. Pythie zoomed in towards Hana’s legs, and inserted her hand into the crystal ball.

Using it, she grabbed Hana’s legs and caused her to trip off balance. Tot Pop took the chance and jumped above her, strumming her guitar as she pinned Hana down, torturing Hana as she did so.

Pythie entered the crystal ball and teleported towards Tot Pop’s location.

“Alright, Tot. We need her alive.”

“Not a problem, Master Frederica!” said Tot Pop as she smashed her guitar to Hana’s head, knocking her unconscious.

Interestingly, Hana didn't transform back. Meaning her mental strength must be strong enough to keep her protected despite losing consciousness. Truly a Land of Magic official.

"So, how'd I do, Master Frederica?"

"You performed wonderfully! My greatest disciple"

"Hmhmhm… That makes me glad to hear, Master Frederica!" said Tot Pop, grinning as she hauled Hana on her shoulders

With Magical Phones not working, Pythie had to rely on meeting up with her team in their assigned meeting spot.

Hopefully, Pukin and Sonia haven't gone crazy enough with their freedom.

☆ **Mao Pam (Remaining Time: 14 Hours, 52 Minutes)**

Mao Pam could see traces of battle.

There was a large hole in the abandoned factory. There were some things that seemed destroyed.

Closer inspection in some of the ground revealed droplets of blood.

There was definitely a fight here.

Earlier, the Genie had visited Pam in the park. Mao Pam recognized her as the opponent she fought. She came hurt and wounded.

She must've seen Postarie and Rain Pou, and decided it was important to show up that she completely forgot that Pam had fought her.

The thing she said,

"Wedin is in danger… Wedin and friends are in danger…"

Pam tried to get her to describe the situation. All that she could muster was that someone named Wedin was in danger, and that they were originally being chased by a Rabbit Eared girl.

Hana was there.

Damn. Mana won't like this.

Postarie, Rain Pou, the Genie, and Pam flew there. Their coats allowed them to fly, as they were also Pam's wings.

Pam wanted to be able to find out where the attackers were, but she only had 2 wings left. Sending one to scout would leave her with only 1 wing. She wouldn't be able to properly defend herself with 1 wing.

Still, the first thing she had to ask was who the culprit was. Traces of magic. Anything of that sort.

At some point, the Magical Girls must have jumped and escaped. Pam noticed black hazy footprints on the rooftop.

Pam had her wing touch them, and they seemed fine, so Pam touched them as well. It felt like a clump of soft ash.

"This was probably magic," concluded Pam out loud.

She turned around to Rain Pou and Postarie,

"One of yours?"

"…I don't know" said Postarie.

"You don't know, or you won't say?"

"She really doesn't know! Neither do I. None of our group can do… whatever that black ash thing is. At least I don't think so," said Rain Pou.

Pam nodded. It seemed like they were telling the truth, at least for now. The best way to proceed is to follow it.

However, if this wasn't one of them, then these are other Magical Girls. Possibly far more skilled than these two. Pam would have a hard time fighting them while protecting the two.

Whatever it was, one thing was clear.

There were intruders inside the barrier, and they were dangerous as well.

☆ **Toko (Remaining Time: 14 Hours, 32 Minutes)**

Toko had been hiding in Rain Pou's chest pocket. She hadn't even peeked out since Mao Pam arrived.

Despite not having a lot of breathing room in a tiny pocket, she dare not let Mao Pam spot her.

Why was someone like Mao Pam even here in the first place?

Anyone in the Land of Magic knew about Pam's power. It's not like Pam kept it a secret, anyways. She's always advertised the fact that she was the most powerful Magical Girl in the Land of Magic.

People would call her *The Ultimate Weapon*. Yet she works for the Foreign Affairs department, who deals in diplomacy. How ironic.

What's worse, it looks like Pam is actually sticking close to both Rain Pou and Postarie. Meaning Toko will have to remain silent for a *very* long time.

Luckily for her, it didn't look like the two girls would rat her out.

Now's her chance to plan ahead. Despite being silent, Toko had always been listening in.

Pam had said that she'd protect the girls. Whether or not that's true remains to be seen, as Pam hasn't exactly been an innocent soul herself.

Despite her manners, Mao Pam was not an innocent soul.

During the old days, Toko had remembered the rumors that Pam would run a deadly school to teach Magical Girls who wanted to be strong.

They were just rumors, but they suited Pam's personality.

Illegal underground training rings, where students would fight each other until they can't fight anymore.

Survival of the fittest. A battle royale.

No Magical Girl had ever been found dead, nor were the charges proven, but if Pam really did conduct those things, then she would have no problem killing anyone in her way.

In fact, she would probably kill Toko if she saw her right now, considering Toko is an actual target.

But Pam also said something about others. Other *what*? Other Magical Girls?

Who were these others? Were they friendly to Toko?

If Pam was considering fighting them, that might be her chance. If Toko could use her partner's help, then when Pam is distracted.

That's when Toko can strike.

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 14 Hours, 21 Minutes)**

This living room was quite crowded.

Sitting around the table were Pythie, Sonia, Pukin, and besides Pukin, her new slave, Wedin.

She had brought Wedin home with her earlier. Something that shocked Pythie, as she didn't expect someone to cooperate willingly.

That's when Pukin revealed her power,

'To alter someone's mind using her magic sword'.

A dangerous, but useful tool.

Rolled up on the floor, both tied up using rope specially made for Magical Girls, were Hana and a stage magician Magical Girl.

Hana was placed in the corner of the room, half conscious. As soon as she was brought home, Pukin had realized that Hana was from the Land of Magic, and started brutally beating up on her.

Hana's face was bloody, bruised, and her eyes barely opened all the way. Pukin had done a number on her, so much so that Pythie had to tell her to stop.

If Hana dies, they lose leverage on Mana.

The stage magician was staring at her surroundings. She must be afraid, and possibly angry. From what Pythie heard, the pirate had died, by Sonia's hand no less.

A shame. Hostages are far better than corpses. But this was the cost of having someone like Pukin and Sonia on the team.

The key to being in control is to allow their ego some space to flourish. This means sacrificing certain things, but in return, Pythie can keep the loyalty of Pukin. Let her think she's in charge, it feeds nothing but her ego.

"Sorry to keep you all waiting! Dinner's ready!"

Tot Pop came in with an apron. On the menu were steak, fish, some salad, and some juicy chicken.

Sonia happily clapped as she began to gobble the food.

Pukin ate her chicken while she played with a stiletto. Apparently a souvenir picked up by Sonia from the dead pirate.

Wedin stared at the chicken plate on her.

"What are you staring at your food for, Wedin? Are you hungry, child?" asked Pukin.

Wedin nodded as she stared at the chicken.

"Then eat! I said you would have a reward, this is your reward for serving me!"

With a smile and a look of joy, Wedin began to eat the chicken on her plate happily.

Did Pukin also had this control on Sonia? The full extent of her powers have to be known. Pythie can't operate on assumptions.

The worst is if Pukin ever turned on Pythie, and used her powers against her.

Pythie turned over to Wedin,

“Wedin, my dear.”

“Yes, Master Frederica?” replied Wedin.

“You fascinate me. Tell me, what are you capable of?”

“I can make people keep their promises and agreements. That’s my power,” said Wedin.

Useful. A speech-based power. The problem with Magical Girl powers is that they’re very open-ended, and so, once again, Pythie had to experiment.

“Then, suppose that this girl- I’m sorry, that’s rude. What’s her name, Wedin? She’s your friend, after all,” asked Pythie.

“Her name is Funny Trick,” said Wedin.

“Funny Trick! Suppose Funny Trick were to agree that she would not lie. She would have to keep it?”

“Yes. It would work.”

Pythie smiled.

“Interesting… Well, Funny Trick. Let’s make this easy on us. Do you promise that you won’t lie in the presence of the great Shogun Pukin?”

Funny Trick simply stared at Pythie. A look of silent rebellion.

“Funny Trick, I’m hurt. I’m offering you a simple way out. Shogun Pukin is certainly not someone you would like to anger. It’s easier to just tell the truth. What do you have to hide from us, hmm?” said Pythie.

Again, Funny Trick said nothing.

“Tsk, Tsk. Perhaps you require a demonstration! Shogun Pukin, you’re free to play with Hana,” said Pythie.

Pukin smiled and stood up. She walked straight to Hana.

“Oh, Shogun Pukin!”

“What is it, Frederica?”

“You can play with Hana, but don’t kill her, if you please.”

Pukin rolled her eyes, and grunted in acknowledgement.

She grabbed Hana by the knee, and moved Hana’s head so that it faced Pukin.

“Hey, wake up!” said Pukin.

Hana was nearly unresponsive.

Pukin slapped her, which only earned painful grunts in response.

Pythie looked at the scene, translating Pukin’s words as necessary to Hana, and Hana’s words to Pukin.

“Your name was Hana, hm? This child on the floor isn’t co-operating. Thanks to her, you’ll get to feel some more pain,” said Pukin grinning.

Pukin unsheathed her sword, and began twirling it around.

“What was your friend’s name, Hana? Mana? That rhymes. You two must be close! Oh, the things I’d love to know about her. I can’t wait to meet her,” said Pukin.

“Shogun Pukin is asking about Mana. She really wants to meet her,” said Pythie to Hana.

Hana looked up at Pukin.

“Tell… your *Shogun*… That if she touches Mana… She’ll wish she was dead,” said Hana in a rough voice.

“I think she just threatened you, Shogun Pukin.”

“Did she now? Haha! She has bravery, a rare trait these days. I’m curious, Hana. Those ears of yours. Are they decorations, or are your rabbit ears actually your ears?” asked Pukin.

“Shogun Pukin is asking about your ears, Hana. She seems interested to know if they’re real.”

Hana simply stayed quiet. Only looking at Pukin in defiance.

Pukin frowned,

“If you won’t tell me, then I guess I’ll have to sate my curiosity myself.”

After saying that, Pukin thrust her rapier through Hana’s right rabbit ear, as it pierced through the wall.

“GYAAAAAAAAAAH!”

Hana’s screams were loud, and Pukin was grinning madly.

Pythie could see Funny Trick in the ground trembling in fear at what she’s seeing. For someone like her, this must be like living her worst nightmare.

Throughout Hana’s constant screams, Pythie explained to Funny Trick,

“Shogun Pukin used to work for the interrogation squad in the Land of Magic. She’s good at finding information, at any cost. If you don’t want to end up like our friend, just do one simple thing. Agree to tell the truth.”

Funny Trick gritted her teeth. Hana’s screams provided the right atmosphere for Funny Trick to be afraid, and it was showing in her face.

Funny Trick nodded.

“Say it then,” asked Pythie.

“I’ll… I’ll tell the truth,” said Funny Trick, shivering in fear.

“She’s agreed, Shogun,” said Pythie.

Pukin smiled and slowly removed the rapier from Hana’s ear, taking her time and wiggling it out of her.

As it finally came out, Hana breathed heavily, trying to catch her breath.

After coughing up some blood, Hana looked up, and with a look of anger…

…She spat blood on Pukin.

Pukin's eyes filled with rage, and she kicked Hana's face with all her might, slamming her head to the wall, knocking her out as her body slumped to the ground.

Pukin wiped the blood off her rapier, "She's still breathing, Frederica, so don't get cranky," she said as she sheathed her sword.

"Shogun, I'm curious. Why didn't you just mind control Hana? Or Funny Trick?" asked Pythie.

"Doesn't work like that, Frederica. My powers are single-target. I could control Hana right now if I wanted to, but if I control *her*…"

Pukin sat on her seat at the table, and she stroked Wedin's head,

"…I lose *this* girl in exchange."

Wedin smiled and leaned on Pukin's shoulders, as Pukin continued to eat her meal.

So her powers were limited. That's good to know. With a power like that, Pukin wouldn't have any reason to follow Pythie at all.

But that means that Sonia was never under Pukin's control, and was loyal from the start. That makes her dangerous as well.

No matter, Pythie had to work with the cards she's dealt.

"Well then, cross-referencing Wedin and Funny Trick. Let's begin our information gathering," said Pukin.

She looked over at both Wedin and Funny Trick.

"To begin with, tell me, Wedin. Everything about your team! Your real names. Your information. Everything."

"I'm the team leader, Wedin. My name is Mine Musubiya, Class Representative. We have 6 more members. Funny Trick, Kayo Nemura. Captain Grace, Umi Shihabara. Postarie, Tatsuko Sakaki. Rain Pou, Kaori Ninotsugi. Kuru-Kuru Hime, Miss Nozomi Himeno. We were transformed by a Fairy named Toko."

“A Fairy? A Fairy’s involved with this? This gets more interesting by the second,” said Pythie.

“I despise torturing Fairies. They’re small, their bodies can’t take the punishment,” said Pukin as she took a bite out of her steak.

“Did you know about any assassin Magical Girls, Wedin?” asked Pythie.

“No. I don’t.”

“Is this true, Funny Trick?”

Funny Trick nodded as her face began to redden, holding back tears.

Pythie nodded.

“What about the Examination Team? What do you know about them?”

“I don’t know anything about an Examination Team,” said Wedin calmly.

“They were the ones alongside Hana over there,” said Pythie as she pointed towards Hana’s unconscious body.

Wedin nodded, “I see. There were several of them. A demonic looking one, the Rabbit Ears, a Witch in a car, and a Ninja.”

Pythie’s eyes lit up.

“I’m sorry, say again? A ninja?”

“Yes. A ninja”

It can’t be.

“Describe this ninja for me!”

“She was wearing a mixture of ninja-looking outfit, mixed with a swimsuit. She had one eye-”

“And one arm!?” asked Pythie.

“Yes. She had one arm”

“Her eye. One eye. You said she had one eye. Did she have a scar on her left eye? Did she only have her right arm? Did she wear a red scarf?” asked Pythie excitedly.

“Yes, yes, and yes.”

Pythie could barely hold her joy back. There was only one Magical Girl in the world that fit that description.

Ripple.

If Ripple was here, then there was also a chance that her friend and partner was here as well. Meaning it’s possible that Pythie would be able to encounter…

…Snow White.

How long has it been? A few years perhaps. Judging on what Tot Pop said, it’s been roughly 2 years since Pythie encountered Snow White.

The ideal Magical Girl.

The one Magical Girl that Pythie believed was capable of changing the way the Land of Magic worked.

Snow White.

She was the one. If she was here, then this coincidence may just be a stroke of luck and fate.

Maybe this setup wasn’t a bad thing?

Could Snow White really be in B-City.

If there was one person Pythie wanted more than anything to meet with again… It’s her.

But Pythie shouldn’t hold her hopes up. Snow White may not be here. Still, it’s possible to get Snow White if she goes through Ripple.

That is something that Pythie Frederica will definitely consider.

“You seem to be excited,” said Pukin non-chalantly.

Pythie only then realized that she was grinning to herself. She cleared her throat,

“Ahem, yes… Well. It appears there may or may not be someone that interests me in this city, that is all.”

“Your fascinations do not interest me, Frederica. Not the least,” said Pukin.

“Moving on, I’m curious as to what your relationship is to… Captain Grace, was it? Hm, Funny Trick?” asked Pythie.

Funny Trick’s face grew redder. She was furious, or maybe she was crying? Pythie couldn’t tell, but she knew that this girl had a lot of emotions running inside of her.

Whatever it was, the girl didn’t answer anything.

Wedin’s magic only forced her to tell the truth. It didn’t force her to answer Pythie’s questions.

Pukin threw a stiletto straight to the couch in the living room, barely hitting Funny Trick’s head as she did.

“Answer her, girl! That’s the pirate’s weapon, isn’t it? Doesn’t it at least fill you with *some* rage?” asked Pukin.

“Shogun Pukin is wondering if you feel any… regret… for Captain Grace dying,” translated Pythie.

Funny Trick remained adamantly silent.

“Tch, Sonia, come say hi to the girl,” ordered Pukin.

Sonia stood up and headed to Funny Trick. She crouched down and smiled widely at her. Sonia waved her hand, and with a smile, she said, “…Hi”

Funny Trick began visibly sweating.

“This was the one that killed her, right? What are you going to do about it, girl?” asked Pukin.

“Funny Trick. This is Sonia Bean. She killed Captain Grace. Don’t you feel *anything* at all? Do you want to kill Sonia?” said Pythie.

Pukin folded her arms and glanced at Pythie as she continued eating.

“Hey, Frederica. You’re looking for an assassin, right?” asked Pukin.

“Yes, why?”

“Assassins are generally known to be distant. They can’t get close to their targets. Professionally, it doesn’t work.”

“What are you implying, Shogun?”

“This girl. She doesn’t seem like she cares much for her supposed friend dying. I suggest you poke into that. I *was* an interrogator, you know? Tells like this often provide much more information than you think,” said Pukin as she took a bite out of her fish.

“An *interesting* proposal,” said Pythie. She looked at Funny Trick, and their eyes locked in with each other.

“Funny Trick. Do you know what Shogun Pukin has suggested? That you really don’t care about Captain Grace. You see, I’m looking for an assassin, hidden somewhere, and I have reason to believe she’s in your group. Now, you don’t seem like you care about your supposed friend. Is Captain Grace a friend of yours?” asked Pythie.

Funny Trick began whimpering.

Pythie turned over to Wedin,

“Wedin, dear. What was their relationship like?” asked Pythie.

“They were close. They were always together. In school, Captain Grace was a popular athlete, and Funny Trick would always hang out with her.”

“My, my! You two are like peas in a pod! So tell me, Funny Trick, *why* is it so hard to answer my question? Were you close to Grace?”

“I… I was close to her… yes,” said Funny Trick, teras streaming down her cheeks.

“But that’s not the *real* question, is it? Of course, people believed you were close, and indeed you did hang out together, but here’s the big question. Did you enjoy her company? Was she a good friend to you?”

Funny Trick began whimpering again, gritting her teeth.

“Could it be… you actually were *glad* that she was gone?” asked Pythie.

“I d- I d- I d…”

Funny Trick tried to answer, but her throat seemed to be stuck.

“You can’t lie, Funny Trick. Why can’t you say *no*? Then it’s true. You actually *were* glad?”

“N- …I do-… I’m no-… Ngh!”

“Are we having a conflict here, Funny Trick? You never liked her, did you? Was it all an act?”

“…STOP! PLEASE… Please… Just stop...” begged Funny Trick as she wept in tears.

“Then just say *no*. What is it, Funny Trick? What are you *hiding*, hmm?” asked Pythie in a soft voice, as she smiled at Funny Trick.

She stood up as she looked down on Funny Trick, rolled on the floor.

“You *wanted* Captain Grace to leave. You wanted her *gone*. Now she’s *dead*, and you were finally *happy*. You’re finally *free* from her, free to live out the way *you* wanted to, is that *correct*?”

“STOP! YOU’RE WRO- NGH! I DON… I DO- I’M NO- NGAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

“SHUT UP!” yelled Pukin as she threw a plate to Funny Trick’s face.

The glass shattered, and Funny Trick only softly whimpered as she continued crying on the floor.

There was silence as Pythie folded her arms.

“What do you think, Shogun? Is she our killer?” asked Pythie.

“I’ve changed my mind. She’s far too cranky to be one. She also made me waste food,” replied Pukin grumpily.

Tot Pop entered the room, carrying more food and of course, an apron.

“Don’t throw my plates, Pukin! Anyways, here’s some seconds. Any requests?”

“Since this girl interrupted me, I’d like Onigiri. I heard it’s a Japanese delicacy. You *can* cook that, can you?” asked Pukin.

“Onigiri? Sure, I can cook Japanese food. Oh, and I’ll make some special big food for Sonia. You’d like that, wouldn’t you, Sonia?”

“Yes please!” said Sonia happily.

“Don’t wolf it down, though. Savor it. Learn to enjoy the little things,” said Tot Pop to Sonia as she picked up the plates of finished food.

Sonia hissed at the suggestion.

“You’ll thank me later,” said Tot Pop.

The room was silent, apart from Funny Trick’s soft sobbing. Pythie had managed to gain enough information on the other side.

Ripple was here. Mana was here. There was an Investigation team. The assassin hasn’t been caught. A fairy was involved. The assassin is likely one of the High School students. There was even a teacher. The Magical Phones were dead.

Pythie had hostages. Hana for leverage against the Investigation team, and Wedin and Funny Trick as leverage for the high school students.

With Wedin’s powers carefully used, Pythie could easily control the battle, so long as she’s still in control.

None of them knew where they were, either.

The scales were tipped to Pythie’s side. Just how she likes it.

All in all, everything is looking up for Pythie. If she was lucky, Snow White might even be here. If she wasn’t… well, Ripple would be a good target to draw her out.

Pythie Frederica smiled, the games have only just begun.

Chapter 8:
Advent

☆ Funny Trick (Remaining Time: 13 Hours, 50 Minutes)

Funny Trick…

Kayo Nemura…

She was just a normal girl. But now, she felt like a monster.

People joke around that Miss Himeno was always nicknamed '*Monster*', because apparently she looked younger than she should be.

Kayo never participated in those kinds of name-callings, and whenever Miss Himeno actually felt like she was probably annoyed, Kayo didn't really understand what it felt like. She figured you could just ignore it.

For the most part, she was correct.

Of course, Miss Himeno got the accusations from others.

Kayo was accusing herself of being a monster right now.

Umi is dead. Umi is dead. Umi is dead.

That's a fact that can't be changed. Kayo had thought she felt remorse, that she felt sad. Somehow, a part of her didn't, and she hated it.

She couldn't lie. She's magically bound to not be able to. Why is her true feelings worse than what she thought she felt?

Umi Shihabara.

Kayo's relationship with that girl has been rocky and complicated, to say the least. Ironically enough, Umi probably thought the exact opposite.

Umi wouldn't understand.

Umi wouldn't be able to understand anymore.

Umi was gone, and some part of Kayo had wanted this. Yet…

…She can't be this cruel…

…Could she?

They were kids. That's when they first met.

Umi Shihabara had been known as the scariest bully in the school. If you go against her or even make her mad, she'll beat you up.

That was a reputation that was pretty hard to get, unless it was backed up by action, and Umi Shihabara was no slouch on that.

Kayo's seen it for herself. Umi can fight. Umi is someone you can't mess with. Umi is someone Kayo could never go up against.

Kids who tried had always gotten bruises. They'd get into fights, then they'd go to the teacher crying with a black eye.

So Kayo always avoided her at school. After all, why go near the predator, right?

One day, Kayo had gone over to the library. She wanted to find her favorite book, *The Robber Hotzenplotz*. Imagine her surprise when she saw someone already reading it, and that someone was none other than Umi Shihabara herself. Why would a bully like her go to a library like this?

Kayo wanted to just go away, but for some reason, she asked Umi if she could read the book.

Umi agreed to share with her and read along, and for a moment, they talked about *Hotzenplotz*, and they actually had a bit of fun.

Still, Kayo kept it in her mind.

Be careful with Shihabara. She might bully you into doing something, and you won't be able to fight back.

She thought it was a one-time thing, but to her surprise, Umi began actively looking for her.

Not only that, Umi would always stick around her, and it felt like she would always beat up other people who seemed to be bothering Kayo.

Kayo wanted to run away, but Umi always stuck closeby with her. Umi always asked her to play, and would be cranky if Kayo didn't.

If Umi was cranky, Umi might do something that Kayo couldn't be able fight against.

Still, having such a strong friend isn't so bad. It's just like that story, where the fox used a lion to do the heavy lifting.

With Umi around, Kayo had never really been under threat from any of the other kids. Of course, it was Umi that Kayo was more worried about.

She remembered the time when Kayo arrived too late at the playground. Umi threw a tantrum, and the climbing pole at the school playground had been kicked until it was practically broken.

Umi was just that strong, and that made Kayo even more scared of her.

As they grew, Kayo had decided that if she was going to have to defend herself at some point, she needed to become as strong as Umi.

Umi had considered it a compliment, but Kayo wanted to do it so that she could actually stop being afraid of her.

Kayo begged her parents to find her a self-defense martial arts class. After days of begging, and with her parents realizing how serious Kayo was, they found her a local Karate lesson, at a dojo not far from her house.

She began to take Karate lessons, something that she thinks she can use to defeat someone like Umi.

She took these lessons after school, giving her an excuse whenever Umi asked her to play with her.

"Kayoo… c'mon!"

"Sorry Umi, I have Karate lessons! Gotta be strong, y'know?"

During those lessons, her teacher had always been kind and helpful, always paying attention to her progress.

He was different from Umi. He was strong and powerful, but he was also wise and kind. Kayo wanted to always spend time with him. She adored him. His words would become her way of life.

One day he said to her,

“It’s important to have physical strength, but it’s also important to strengthen your heart and your mind.”

Those words stuck with Kayo for a long time. Not only did she constantly train to perfect her body, but she also trained her mind.

She studied, she expanded her worldview, and she eventually rose up as one of the brightest in her class.

Then, one day…

Kayo had finished school, and was on her way to her Karate lessons as usual. However, when she got to the Dojo, she saw something that made her heart sink.

‘*Property for sale*.’

The Dojo was empty, and her teacher wasn’t there. She tried to find him, and when she did, he explained that he was having trouble with money, and that he had to move to a new town to support his family with a new job.

This devastated Kayo, who begged him to stay, but unfortunately, that was the end of it.

Kayo was dragged back into where she was before. Umi constantly sticking to her, constantly forcing her to do things with her. Kayo couldn’t stand it.

The fact that the one person who gave her a philosophy that she followed was now gone from her life filled her with an intense hate.

The one thing she had that could separate her from Umi was gone.

Kayo hated that…

…And it was all projected towards Umi.

Her image was already solidified in elementary school. She was ‘Umi’s closest friend’. She would forever be. People knew them as that.

All the way until Middle School it was that.

Finally, Kayo saw an exit. A way out. Just like her old Karate master had taught her. Be strong in your mind as well.

An entrance exam to a prestigious high school, Namiyama High School. This school promised only the brightest students, and had a fairly difficult entrance exam to filter it out.

This was a way for Kayo to escape Umi. Umi wasn’t really that intelligent, so she couldn’t possibly pass these exams.

However, they were also tough for Kayo as well. So she began studying. She took private lessons without telling her friends, she had various vaccinations to prevent herself from catching any unneeded diseases, and she avoided a lot of socializing.

Everything was dedicated to passing this one exam.

Kayo had lost sleep, she’d isolated herself, her social life in her old school was fairly non-existent, save for Umi, who still stuck to her.

Soon enough, it will be over. She can start over. A new life.

Test day came. Kayo arrived in Namiyama High, ready to attend the one thing that will move her life on forever.

But someone was there as well. Someone she didn’t expect.

Umi Shihabara.

Why was she participating in the test? Did she know where Kayo was going? How did she even find out?

The one chance that Kayo had of escaping Umi.

It didn’t matter. How would Umi even pass this test? It was considered one of the harder schools to get into. Only the top students should pass.

So Kayo thought none of it, and continued on doing the test. Days of studying paid off, and Kayo was able to get most of the answers correct. Enough that she thought she could be accepted.

A few weeks later, the results were posted. Searching for her name, Kayo managed to find it. She was accepted into Namiyama, she's finally free!

But there was still one issue.

Out of curiosity, Kayo looked up Umi's name. Within the list of accepted students. That's when she saw it…

…Umi Shihabara

She was accepted too? How!? Kayo knew that Umi had never been that good with her grades.

Kayo had asked around school, and there were several rumors that spread about Umi. Most prominently that Umi's parents paid Namiyama to get her in, since they are actually quite wealthy.

Regardless, the facts haven't changed. Kayo is still stuck with Umi.

First day of High School, Kayo had surrendered.

She had given up trying to get away with Umi. Fate had somehow dictated that they would stay together forever.

Umi continued on being who she is, and Kayo continued to try her best to deal with her situation.

Even in High School, where Umi and Kayo's reputation was reset, Umi quickly became popular as she joined the athletics club.

Kayo would be under Umi's shadow. Unable to voice her opinion, unable to say a word.

If she confronted Umi about it, Kayo didn't think it would end well. She knew enough Karate to fight back, but not enough to match up to Umi's raw strength.

Whatever Umi wanted, whatever she asked Kayo to do, she would listen.

She'd given up the fight.

Even when she was placed in this extraordinary situation of becoming a Magical Girl, Kayo tried to think it through.

Kayo knew something was off about Toko. Yet nobody listened to her.

Umi was the one they all agreed with. Her speech made everyone unite under Toko's banner.

Kayo was only able to do the best she could to keep Umi from being reckless and careless.

At first, she thought that being a Magical Girl wouldn't change them much, aside from having powers. She was wrong, however, when she found out it enhanced their physical abilities as well.

And Umi, being the athletic rebellious girl she was, had her abilities enhanced to 11.

As Captain Grace, her strength, speed, and combat potential far outclass any of the other Magical Girls. It was proven when she fought Rabbit Ears alone when Rabbit Ears easily took out the whole class. Umi was the one that didn't fall easily.

So now, not only is Umi's personality constant, but nobody could potentially fight back against her due to her strength.

When Wedin was voted in as leader, Kayo was relieved to have an intelligent-minded person leading them, but Umi predictably threw a tantrum. Just like she was before.

Umi hasn't changed at all.

Kayo was frustrated at that. But she was nothing if not patient. Being stuck with Umi meant Kayo had to deal with her daily, and ensure that no one else gets into trouble due to her actions.

Just like when they were kids, Umi had dragged her to see a display of her cool powers. Umi had dragged her to the ship, without asking what *she* wanted at all.

Separated from the group, Umi actually listened to reason when Kayo and her teamed up to take down that black humanoid monster thing. For once, Umi did the smart thing, not the stupid one.

Kayo hope that she would be able to unite with the others again, but it became crushed when she found out that her Magical Phone didn't work. Now she was stuck with Umi.

Umi, who always wanted Kayo to follow her into danger.

Umi, who always wanted her to listen to everything she said.

Umi, who Kayo can't fight against, but can only try and control. To try and guide.

Kayo just wanted her to leave.

Then, that fight happened. The fight at the warehouse, the chase, the patchwork pale girl. Everything went by so fast.

She thought Umi would be okay, because she was Umi, right?

Then she saw her disappear into a black haze. Umi had been killed.

Umi is dead.

Kayo wanted her gone, and now she's dead.

No…

Did she really want her gone? The fortune-teller asked her to admit it, but Kayo defied it.

There's no reason for Umi to die here. Umi shouldn't die.

Umi's always been at her side, she's always been persistent, like being stuck to her by some magical glue.

Kayo had always tried to get away from her, but Umi always stuck with her. They were practically labeled together as childhood friends.

Now Umi was gone.

Did Kayo really hate her? Kayo can't be a monster, Kayo never thought of herself as someone cruel. She never did.

She can't be.

So why can't she answer that she cares about Umi?

Did she really hate her?

Whenever there was danger, Umi would always look it in the eye and smiled, while Kayo would be the one to avoid it.

Now that she thinks about it, Umi seemed to always be trying to protect her.

Umi shouldn't die.

But Kayo wanted her gone.

But she didn't deserve to die.

Kayo hated her.

But was Umi a bad person, or was Kayo just being unreasonable?

The fact that she's being faced with the truth of how she really felt about a person who considered Kayo a friend…

…Umi considered her a friend.

Now she was gone.

Umi… Come back.

Kayo was conflicted. She was conflicted in herself. She was conflicted in what kind of person she thought she was, and what kind of person she actually was.

Umi was someone she didn't like, but she didn't deserve to die.

So why couldn't Kayo say 'no'?

Come to think of it, Umi was never really… *bad*. She was reckless, and stupid, and cranky. She was annoying, but…

But…

The one that ultimately wanted her gone was Kayo.

You wanted her to leave. Now that she's dead, you're finally free.

The words of the fortune-teller echoed in her head. It constantly taunted her, constantly reminded her of what she was.

It's not true.

But she couldn't say it.

It's not true.

Based on this magic, she apparently did feel glad that Umi had died. That Umi was gone. Some part of her did at least.

That's not me.

Kayo was disgusted in herself.

Deep down, I…

For once in her life, she missed Umi Shihabara.

Funny Trick gritted her teeth. She was trapped, tied up. The ropes were unbreakable. She saw the Fortune-Teller grab something from her crystal ball, and pulled out the rope.

That crystal ball must be the key to her power.

The Rabbit Eared girl, Hana, was unconscious on the corner of the room.

The swordsman is talking to the fortune-teller.

The patchwork girl was eating her food.

The rockstar was somewhere in the kitchen.

The fortune-teller was discussing calmly with the swordsman.

Wedin was smiling drunkenly while leaning on the swordsman's shoulders.

The situation looks very bad. But remember what your Karate teacher said, Funny Trick. Strength in mind, not only physical strength.

Every Magical Girl seems to have enhanced abilities, but some have more of an advantage than others.

Rabbit Ears ran on all fours and was fast, and she jumped high as well.

Captain Grace was a pirate, and Umi was also an athlete, so she was very strong and can keep up with the best.

So what was Funny Trick's specialty?

Stage Magician… Stage Magician… Wait a minute!

Funny Trick messed with her wrists, she twisted and twirled them. After a few moments of trying, she actually managed to feel like she's escaping from the tied rope.

Flexibility. Funny Trick is extremely flexible. She was a stage magician, and they're known to be escape artists.

Funny Trick became comfortable with her movements, silently practicing. Even though she could free herself, she shouldn't free herself right now. That would be a bad idea, and she'd be killed or worse.

Umi once told her,

"When the bad guys don't notice it, that's when you kick 'em where it hurts!"

Can't believe she's actually taking advice from her. Umi was right though, Funny Trick had to be patient. She had to wait for that opportunity. Even if it takes her a long time. It will come.

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 13 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

The hour was late, and almost nobody was at Namiyama High School. Wedin had lead them here. This would be the perfect place to find any traces of hair of the students.

The gate was locked, but Sonia easily disintegrated that lock.

Pythie left Tot Pop to guard the car. In the back was Hana, who had her ears muffled with magically enhanced earmuffs, her eyes blindfolded by magically enhanced blindfolds, and her mouth gagged as well. No risks taken. Funny Trick was also lain down on the backside floor of the car.

Pythie took Pukin and Sonia with her to the school. She couldn't trust them both to guard the hostages, especially not Pukin.

With the help of Wedin, they scoured the hallways. First, the lockers. There was no trace of hair there.

Next, the bathrooms. Unfortunately, the janitors of the school were fairly meticulous, and the bits of hair that they *did* find weren't of the Magical Girls.

Asking about their home addresses yielded nothing, since Wedin was never close to any of the others, she didn't have any of their addresses. However, there might be a lead.

Wedin had told her that one of the Magical Girls is in fact their teacher. When asked, Wedin confirmed that her name was Nozomi Himeno. This was a lead.

Pythie broke into the teacher's lounge, the offices of the principals, the various documents and data. She found Nozomi's desk. Filled with some personal memorabilia. No hair there, unfortunately.

However, hidden away in the head of the school's office was an information file. It had information on the staff, and how students could contact them. It contained their phone numbers, and their home address.

Checkmate.

The drive was a bit short as well. This teacher lived a few blocks away from the school, in a district of small traditional Japanese houses.

It wasn't barred at the gate.

Pythie and Pukin went inside. The door was locked, but Pukin forced it open.

Just then, they heard a noise from inside the house.

"Nozomi? Is that you? You're home late"

An old man's voice. And from the end of the hallway, peeked out an old man with gray hair. He saw Pythie and Pukin, and had a wide eyed expression on his face.

"W-Who are you?" he asked.

Pukin didn't wait. In an instant, she cut his throat.

"Shogun, wai-" said Pythie, but it was too late. Pukin had already killed him.

“He saw us, it was precaution,” said Pukin.

“He was obviously a relative, possibly her father. Keeping him alive would be useful. There’s merit in leverage, Shogun,” said Pythie, attempting to be calm despite her built up frustration.

“What’s done is done, Frederica. You won’t need leverage if we’ll know where they are,” said Pukin as she wiped the blood from her rapier. As the old man lay twitching and dying on the ground.

“As you say, Shogun…”

Pythie declined to elaborate further. They couldn’t just attack them all, even if Pythie found her hair. Assuming Pythie *doesn’t* find hair, then the father would’ve been useful as a hostage.

What’s done is done.

Pythie found Nozomi’s room, and in her bed were parts of Nozomi’s hair. Nobody ever really cleans their bed properly. It’s where they sleep, and it’s where most of your hair would fall out.

Nozomi’s hair was curly, soft, beautiful hair. Pythie took some small strands and twirled it around her fingers. What she saw was a ribbon-ballerina Magical Girl.

Perfect.

She adjusted her crystal ball’s angles. Trying to find any windows. She found what seemed to be a reference point.

Returning to the car, she showed it to Wedin, who nodded and said that she recognizes the buildings in the image.

Everything’s proceeding nicely. If they keep this up, then the element of surprise will be maintained.

After mentioning the directions, Tot Pop stared driving.

☆ **Ripple (Remaining Time: 13 Hours, 10 Minutes)**

“Change of clothes?” asked Ripple.

“I’m prepping for battle, not attending a fashion show,” replied Mana as she put on a black coat.

“Battle? You want to join the fighting?”

“I’m here for a reason. I’m not going to sit this one out, Ripple,” said Mana as she placed her witch hat.

“I don’t mean to disrespect you, but you won’t survive a real fight. You’re not a Magical Girl, you’re out of your weight class.”

“What makes you think-”

A sudden shuriken passed through the side of Mana, missing her and hitting the wall behind her.

“If I were aiming for you, you’d be dead now,” said Ripple.

Mana gritted her teeth.

“Alright then, do me a favor Ripple. Throw your shuriken to this cloak,” said Mana as she threw a black cloak up high.

3 Shuriken were launched towards it, all sticking towards the cloak. Mana caught the cloak, and removed the Shuriken one by one.

“Magically enhanced. Anti-Piercing. Anti-Ripping. My cloak can even stop a sword,” said Mana as she placed the cloak around her.

With full black witch attire, Mana genuinely looked like a Magical Girl, or at least a Witch. It reminded Ripple of her old comrade.

“So you’ve got some amount of protection. They’re still going to come in for close combat. There’s more ways for a Magical Girl to kill you other than just throwing stuff at you.”

Mana took out her wand. With a wave, a spark of flame launched at left a burn mark on the wall ahead.

Ripple simply nodded.

Mana tucked the wand away in her coat, and she looked at Ripple.

“I know I’m not fit to fight Magical Girls, or defend myself from them. I hear enough of that shit from Hana, I’m not going to hear any of it from you.”

“Just promise me something, Mana.”

“What?”

“If push comes to shove, let me and the other Magical Girls handle it. Don’t try to be a hero. It’s not worth it if you die.”

“After finding out that most of my team may be withholding information from me? I don’t think so.”

“You should learn to trust people, Mana. It could save your life.”

“Tch!”

Ripple felt like she was looking at a reflection of herself. Did Mana just *Tch* at her? Was this how Top Speed felt?

She couldn’t help but feel embarrassed. Ripple was so stupid back then. Reckless, stubborn. She understood that now, but like they say, hindsight is 20/20.

Mana placed a bag on the table. It had a star-shape on it.

Ripple glanced at the bag,

“4-Dimensional bag?” asked Ripple.

“Yep. Always carry one around. Has near unlimited space. You know this?”

“I’ve… seen one before, yeah.”

“In your test?”

“Yep.”

“This sort of stuff wasn’t supposed to be given to rookie Magical Girls in the first place.”

“How did Fav get it?”

“Most likely he made a request. From what I know, Fav falsified all his reports. He made a request for the items on behalf of his administrator, and the Land of Magic probably gave him access to it.”

That explains why there’s only one of each item. They weren’t supposed to be given to more than one Magical Girl.

“Mana… What *do* you know about my test?” asked Ripple, curious as to how the Land of Magic viewed her experiences.

“Just the facts. I wasn’t leading the investigation for that one. Everyone on the Examination Division heard it though.”

“I want to know.”

“First off, that’s classified information. Secondly, you already know everything about your test. Nothing we would have would be helpful to you.”

“I want to know if the Land of Magic gave a shit. I want to know their version of the events.”

Mana sighed heavily. She thought about it for a bit, and then she placed her wand down and took a chair.

“One condition,” said Mana.

“What?”

“You tell me about Frederica, Snow White, all of this.”

“I thought that was *your* job.”

“Do you think I’m omnipotent? The one mistake, the *one* mistake that everyone always makes is that the Land of Magic is some omnipresent being. Not that the Land of Magic tries to dissuade that. They’d love that image.”

“Fine. Now tell me what you know.”

Mana nodded and began,

“Like I said, it’s probably just the facts, nothing too detailed. What I know was the people involved. I know that Fav falsified a lot of his reports.”

“How did Fav kill people?”

“Mascots can give you the ability to become Magical Girls, and they can take them away. Normally, we’d just erase their memories and take their phones. Taking away their powers kills them.”

“And the items?”

“From what I know, Fav filed a report for the need of magical items. He said something about an accident where one of the Magical Girls died. Labeled it urgent. He was a mascot, so the Land of Magic trusted his judgement”

“You trusted him just because he was a mascot?”

“Mascots are supposed to help people. They’re meant to assist their Administrators, and they can’t physically affect much of anything other than giving advice and powers”

“And yet Toko’s causing a lot of problems. First Fav, now her? Seems like you need to keep an eye on your mascots”

“Fav and Toko are the exceptions, *not* the norm. Most mascots actually care.”

The two of them stayed silent for a while.

Then Ripple spoke again,

“Did it at least matter?”

“What?”

“When you all found out, what was the Land of Magic’s reaction?”

“Oh… you want to talk about *that*? That was a shit show. We began to dig more into Clamberry, found out about other tests she’s done. Some of them with hundreds of Magical Girls at a time. Everyone was pissed for different reasons. Some people quit, others tried to scramble for power, and then there are the idiots who actually think Clamberry’s some kind of martyr.”

“Well, at least you guys didn’t sit on it.”

“I’ve told you enough. Now tell me about Frederica.”

Ripple nodded. She began to talk,

“After Clamberry’s test, Snow and I decided to group up for a bit. We trained, trying to get better, since both of our mentors were gone. Frederica then showed up, claimed to be from the Land of Magic. She offered to help us, since we didn’t have mentors”

“So you were her apprentice?”

“It was more like Snow. That was who she was interested in.”

“Do you know where Snow White is now?”

“I don’t know.”

“Don’t you keep in contact with her?”

“I did. I used to.”

“What happened?”

“Frederica happened. Snow and I found out about the truth, Frederica was insane. We caught her, arrested her, and then Snow decided it was best to split. Never heard from her directly, ever since.”

Mana folded her arms and closed her eyes, “A shame. You know she’s earned quite a name for herself back home. *Magical Girl Hunter*. I’ve read you two’s recruitment files from Fav when we were investigating Clamberry. Personality-wise, you seem similar enough. Snow White though, what I hear now and what I’ve read back then… she’s diffent. What the *hell* happened to her?”

Ripple glanced over at Mana. She took a deep breath, and sighed heavily,

“I lost an arm and an eye, but Snow White came out worse than I ever did.”

Pythie Frederica was worse than any other person that Ripple had encountered before.

Clamberry, although Ripple never met her directly, was responsible for the killing game, and therefore responsible for the death of Top Speed.

Calamity Mary was worse, because she did horrible things for the sake of doing horrible things. She never even justified them. Ripple despised her.

Frederica… Pythie Frederica was worse than both of them. Pythie understood what she was doing. She had a plan. Pythie had an end goal, and that makes her dangerous.

There was silence, as the two acknowledged each other. That silence was soon broken when 7753 entered the room.

“How is she?” asked Ripple.

“She’s in her human form. She’s really worried sick about her students y’know?” replied 7753.

“Does your *boss* have any info for us?” asked Mana with annoyance.

“Yeah. She’s been looking up the convicts. Here’s what she’s told me. There are official files from the HR Division. Pythie Frederica’s powers involve being able to see anyone in any location with her crystal ball-”

“She needs that person’s hair for it to work,” said Ripple, cutting off 7753.

“So it shouldn’t work for us. She can’t possibly have any of our hair, right?” asked Mana.

“She might have some of mine. But since she hasn’t made any appearances so far, I doubt that’s the case,” said Ripple.

Mana nodded, “Continue.”

“…Right, so, Tot Pop, known leader of a Resistance cell. Her powers involve materializing notes from her guitar. The notes supposedly cause damage based on size and other factors. Sonia Bean’s power is something to do with disintegration, and Pukin has a sword that she can use to alter your mind.”

Mana’s eyes widened,

“Wait, alter your mind? Mind control? Shit.”

7753 nodded with a worried expression.

Mana began taking out items from the 4-D bag, her face getting angrier at what 7753 had just previously said.

“First off, if we’re dealing with mind control, that changes the game. Hana and Pam aren’t back here, and if they got to them, we’re pretty much done. I’m going to need to brief you two on our weapons.”

Mana pulled out several cylindrical objects from the bag.

“Grenades?” asked Ripple.

“No, not that lethal. Smoke bombs. Thick, magically enhanced smoke bombs. Useful for obscuring,” said Mana.

“That won’t work well for me. I need to see what I’m throwing if I’m going to hit it.”

“They’re *magically enhanced*. An explosion from one of these could hurt a Magical Girl. Probably won’t kill one, but still. Besides, at least I know how to weaken your powers if you ever get mind controlled,” said Mana in a condescending tone.

Ripple’s got to hand it to Mana, she’s got spunk, and she’s not afraid of anything. She just hopes that recklessness doesn’t lead to death.

Mana then pulled out a small bottle filled with tablets and pills. Ripple remembered these. Healing Medicine.

“They call these things Healing Medicine but it’s not completely accurate. Yes, it could heal, but it also enhances your body strength, endurance, and durability. If I have one of these, I could become as durable as a low-powered Magical Girl. If any of you have it, it’ll be one hell of a fight for them.”

Mana then pulled out what seemed to be small syringes with green liquid.

“This is the same thing, but in liquid injected form. I’m trusting some of these to you, Ripple. If we ever need a dose, you throw it at us. The syringe will inject itself and do the rest.”

Ripple nodded silently. She then walked over to Mana, and looked at her straight in the eye.

“Mana. What if we find one of our own on their side?”

Mana blinked at the thought. She then replied,

“If it’s Pam, we try to avoid her. Either way, we find a way to bring them back.”

“What if we can’t?”

“We’ll cross that bridge if we get there.”

“Mana. I don’t want to have to say it, but I know you’re dodging the question I’m trying to ask. I’m saying, if we find Hana, what would you-”

“*If*… it’s Hana. We’ll cross. That bridge. *If* we get there.”

With those words, Mana began packing some of the things away, and distributing part of them to Ripple and 7753.

“One more thing,” said Mana.

She placed her witch hat, and zipped up her bag.

“I assumed that our car would be damaged. I always do, so I had a backup plan. There’s another car downstairs. Ripple, whatever you do… do *not* throw the car.”

“Okay… I won’t throw it. Why, what happened to the last car?”

“Don’t ask.”

7753 chuckled nervously in the background.

“Pick up the ballerina, Ripple, we should move,” said Mana.

Ripple nodded, and headed towards the room where Kuru-Kuru Hime was.

Silently, she hoped that both Hana and Mao Pam were okay. Knowing that Pukin has the potential for mind control, she hoped that they haven’t reached them.

Despite Mao Pam being Clamberry’s former mentor, Ripple can’t blame her for what happened. She doesn’t know her, she can’t judge her prematurely.

She trusted her original instincts, that Pam was gentle at heart, despite the revelation that Ripple had found, despite the instinctive hateful reaction she had, she can’t judge Pam without hearing her side of the story.

And no matter what, she will hear that side of her story. She's going to find Pam, and find Hana, and stop Pythie.

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 12 Hours, 20 Minutes)**

Nozomi Himeno was in human form. Her Magical Phone didn't work so there was no point to staying as a Magical Girl.

Besides, the other Magical Girls should keep her safe, right?

Despite her Magical Phone not working, it looked like her cellphone worked just fine. She had to do this the old fashioned way.

But dialing a student's number isn't that easy. Nozomi didn't know anyone personally for them to give her their contact number.

In fact, most of the student body probably wouldn't give her their contact number, considering she was called *Monster* by the entire school. But there has to be *some* way of contacting her students.

An idea sprung to mind. Her house. She kept tabs on several students that have gotten projects and whatnot. Perhaps she could ask for help there.

Her father stayed at her house, so she should be able to contact him.

Nozomi dialed into her cellphone, her heart beating nervously. A long dial tone, no answer.

Nozomi became nervous.

Maybe he was asleep. It's late at night.

She called again. She waited patiently. A long dial tone, and a voice message. The more she attempted to call, the more nervous she became.

Her heart was beating rapidly. Why hadn't her father answered the phone? Surely he would've woken up with the phone making so much noise at night.

Did they get to him?

No, don't entertain that thought. Nozomi couldn't handle that stress on her. Her chest began to hurt, not from pain, but from worry. That sinking feeling you get when you feel something bad has happened.

Where was he?

Nozomi transformed back into a Magical Girl. She sighed deeply, as the transformation eased her heart rate. It's true that Magical Girl bodies enhance your physical capabilities. They could even enhance your heart rate and steady it down.

Kuru-Kuru Hime felt less nervous than before, but she couldn't help sense an uneasy feeling. Her father wasn't home.

And then something slammed behind her. The force of another girl diving into her, pushing her away.

Hime didn't have time to look at who it was, she simply rolled along with her. The girl threw some kunai at what seemed to be Hime's original position.

It was the ninja, Ripple. But what was she throwing at?

Hime had been tackled by Ripple, rolled away, and Ripple had thrown kunai at where Hime was originally. Where she was…

…There was a floating hand.

The hand seemed like it was coming out of thin air. When Ripple's kunai nearly reached it, the hand retreated back to nothing, as Ripple's kunai passed and hit the walls behind it.

"We've been compromised! Frederica has someone's hair!" yelled Ripple.

Who? Frederica? Compromised? What's going on.

Everything happened fast. The girl dressed as a witch and the girl with goggles burst into the room, confused and looking around.

"Ripple, what's going on?" asked the witch.

"Get away from the door, Frederica can see us! Mana, smoke bombs, *now*!" yelled Ripple.

“What!? Slow down! What the hell is going on?” asked the Witch

“Pythie Frederica can see us! Smoke! *Now*!”

“…Shit!”

The witch- Mana, threw the smoke bomb at the ground. The large explosive bang coincided with large amounts of smoke filling the room. Hime couldn’t help but close her eyes as the cloud engulfed her. This wasn’t a normal smoke grenade used by riot police.

Ripple held close to Hime, hugging her from behind tightly, preventing her from moving.

“Don’t move. Stay quiet. 7753, I need you to scan the outside buildings for anyone with a crystal ball, got that?” said Ripple’s voice.

Hime couldn’t see anyone, but the voice of someone replied, “Roger that!”

After a few seconds later, the same voice shouted. Hime could only see vague silhouettes in all this smoke.

“They’re in a car, parked about two blocks ahead.”

Two girls approached Hime and Ripple. The witch and goggles girl. They crouched closeby, still covered in the smoke.

Ripple looked at both of them,

“I’ve got an idea. Mana, you still have that car?”

“Yeah?”

“Well, I’m not going to throw it, but this’ll probably end up ruining it…”

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 11 Hours, 50 Minutes)**

Pythie had forgotten about Ripple. She would be the only one who knew how her powers worked. This changes things.

She should’ve expected it. It was a foolish mistake.

But Ripple was smart, and now Pythie couldn't see much through her crystal ball. The smoke had covered almost the entire room, with no possible angles visible.

"What now, Frederica?" asked Pukin from the back.

"If they don't come out, we'll have to storm in."

"Why not just hop in with your crystal ball?"

"Because, Shogun, we don't know what they're preparing. Ripple has the ability to always hit her shots. If they anticipate us, we won't know where she is."

Pukin growled in acknowledgement. Pythie calmly watched the building in front of them. If they didn't come out for a few more minutes, they'd have to go in by themselves.

That's when they saw a car crash through the building. Its side windows were rolled down, and smoke was flowing through the car.

"Holy shit, is that them?" asked Tot Pop.

Smart move, an escape with the car. The windows rolled down prevent the smoke from killing Mana, who didn't have Magical Girl physiology to dispel the fumes of the smoke.

They were making a run for it and using the smoke to hide any movements.

"Tot, chase them," ordered Pythie.

"On it!"

Tot Pop slammed on the gas pedal, and their car jolted forward. The shake causing Funny Trick, who was placed on the floor in the backseat, to hit her head and groan in anger. Pukin responded by kicking her silent.

"Haha! Wonderful! A car chase? I've never participated in one, myself, but I know it's exhilarating," exclaimed Pukin, grinning in the back.

"Only for the passengers, pumpkin hair. Trust me, the *driver* is the one that has all the stress," said Tot Pop, as she focused herself to keep her eye on the road, making sharp turns to adjust for Mana's car's movements.

"Don't get too close, Tot!" said Pythie.

“What? Frederica, what are you talking about?” asked Pukin angrily.

“If we drive close enough for Ripple to see any of us, we’d be sitting ducks, Shogun. Following them at a safe distance is the safest plan for now.”

Tot Pop tried her best to keep up with the car. Mana must have enchanted the car so that it’ll always be faster, disobeying the laws of physics and bending them so that they won’t have to slow down.

Pythie didn’t have that sort of magic, and had to rely on Tot Pop’s skills as a driver to catch them.

Mana’s car had headed towards a traffic lane that went in the opposite direction. Smart, they’re hoping the other cars would throw them off.

“Hang on tight!” said Tot Pop as she swerved through incoming traffic, shaking the car left and right.

“Why don’t you just place your hand in your crystal ball and get them already, Frederica?”

“I told you, Shogun, I can’t see anything. If they pull me towards their car, you lose me, and we no longer have an advantage”

The chase through oncoming traffic wasn’t enough to deter Tot Pop, as her skills as a driver were enough to dodge any cars.

Pythie looked through the crystal ball. Still smoke. There’s no point anymore. Pythie tucked her crystal ball inside her jacket.

Mana’s car drifted off the highway, and headed towards an alleyway through some buildings.

“Think you can follow them, Tot?” asked Pythie.

Tot Pop breathed a deep sigh, and swiveled around towards the tight and narrow alleyway. Mana’s car didn’t lose a beat, sharply turning where it should be impossible for that momentum, but Tot Pop’s car had to follow the laws of physics.

She continued to try, but had to slow down during some sharper turns within the alleys.

Finally, the two cars made it out, and Mana's car took a sharp turn towards what seemed to be open road.

Now's the chance, Tot Pop slammed the gas, and their car sped forward instantly, as they got closer and closer to Mana's car, from behind, smoke still emanating from their side windows.

Closer…

Closer…

Closer…

Suddenly, Mana's car crashed into something invisible. It stopped in a jolt, its front part smashed.

Invisible…

The barrier

"Tot! Barrier!"

Tot Pop's reaction was instantaneous, she immediately hit the brakes and turned, but the car simply swerved out of control, and crashed towards a nearby light pole, sending the magical girls inside flying out.

Pythie landed screeching in the pavement, with Tot Pop using her guitar to cushion her own fall. The others, Pukin, Sonia, Hana, and Wedin, all flew as well, but they had already begun to stand up.

Funny Trick was still in the car, laying down on the ground prevented her from flying.

Sonia immediately found Hana, who was groaning on the ground, and grabbed her, preventing her from escaping.

Pythie found Tot Pop standing up, she approached her apprentice.

"Tot, are you okay?"

"Hah… Hah… I'm good, Master Frederica… Just gimme a bit."

"Frederica! Come here, *now*!" yelled Pukin.

She'd been calling for Pythie. She must've wanted to see Mana's wrecked car. Why on earth did they drive straight to the barrier? That part didn't make sense to Pythie.

When she arrived at the wreck, Sonia was already in the middle of disintegrating the car.

But when everything was gone, they found in the car seats, nothing. Four empty car seats, and nobody was there.

Teleportation? No, think more logically.

Mana enchanted the car, that much is true, otherwise it could've passed through the barrier. A magically enchanted car would be stopped at the barrier.

What was the smoke for? Preventing Pythie from looking through the crystal ball.

Why did they put smoke on the car? In order to create a false relationship between the smoke Pythie saw and the smoke on the car.

Why did they want Pythie to notice the car? To draw them away from their real location.

The only answer, Mana enchanted the car to drive towards the barrier, placing smoke bombs inside the car in order to fool Pythie into thinking the car had them, when in reality, they were never in the car in the first place.

My my, well played…

Pukin grabbed Pythie by the collar,

"Frederica, what is the meaning of this?" she said as she brought the rapier close to Pythie's throat.

Pythie remained calm, she couldn't show any fear, since that is would make Pukin feel in control. She should, however, show submissiveness, in order to prevent Pukin from thinking she's a big threat.

"My apologies, Shogun. It seems I've been fooled."

"Give me one reason why I shouldn't kill you now for failing,"

“Killing me would prevent use of my powers, and you wouldn’t be able to find the Investigation Team.”

“Then I’ll just control you, Frederica. What’s to stop me from that?”

“Counter-productive. I’m already loyal to you, Shogun. Controlling our enemies would better serve us in the long run.”

Pythie could see Pukin considering her options. Pukin lifted Pythie up, and grazed her back towards the barrier, Pythie could feel the effects begin to take over, as she began to slowly feel pain throughout her body, and her hearing became dimmer.

She could feel blood building up, and she found it harder to breathe.

Pukin then threw Pythie across the street. Pythie began to regain her senses again.

“Know this, Frederica. This alliance better end well for me, otherwise it’s you who should be worrying about your life.”

Pythie coughed some blood, with Tot Pop coming towards her to help her up.

A quick check in Pythie’s jacket. She needed that crystal ball back. However, something was wrong. When she reached inside, instead of a smooth glass surface, she found a rough rocky one.

She pulled out something, which wasn’t a crystal ball. It was a large rock of some kind. It changed.

Funny Trick.

Pythie ran over towards the car, and found that the back door was open. Inside was some untied rope.

They left her alone, Funny Trick had escaped, and Pythie no longer has her crystal ball.

At this sight, Pythie couldn’t help but chuckle and laugh, she hadn’t felt excited like this in a long time.

Very well played.

“Frederica! What’s going on, now!?” yelled Pukin from afar.

Very well played indeed.

☆ **Postarie (Remaining Time: 11 Hours, 38 Minutes)**

Tatsuko had never been good with making friends. That was mostly because she wasn't really outgoing to begin with. Or, at least not in her middle school years.

During kindergarten, she tried to befriend some kids, but for some reason they would play rough with her, or steal her toys.

This made her frightened of interaction, despite her teachers trying to get her to play with the others. She didn't want to be bullied around.

Come to think of it, she didn't really understand why the kids acted like that. Was it because Tatsuko simply looked weak? Or was it due to her soft voice?

When she went to elementary, she had gotten used to being alone. It didn't really bother her as much. Despite what people say about loners, Tatsuko enjoyed the quietness. She took solace in reading Manga.

Her favorite was a Mecha-genre Manga. It was about a boy who had a giant robot. This boy had a remote control to pilot his robot, and he'd use it to save his school. The boy was also about elementary age, which made it more appealing to Tatsuko.

She loved those stories of kids becoming heroes and saving the world. She'd read them every day during recess or lunch break.

She continued immersing herself in Manga, not really talking to anyone, all the way until middle school. The only people she'd interact with are classmates who she had to work in groups with.

The other students had already given her the reputation of that one quiet girl, who'd just spend her time reading Manga when everyone was busy hanging out. That life suited her, it was fine for her.

However, her parents were worried for her social life. They were worried that she might become a recluse. So they decided to enroll her in a private high school. Namiyama High School.

This school would require good grades and a fairly high exam score to pass. Luckily for Tatsuko, she didn't really have much of a social life stopping her, so she easily aced the entrance exams.

When she arrived at Namiyama, her parents thought that because the students there were mostly calmer, nicer, and slightly wealthier and smarter kids, that they'd hit it off with Tatsuko. Unfortunately for them, Tatsuko remained the same.

It was never the kids' fault. Tatsuko just never felt the need to reach out and talk to others. She just preferred being alone and enjoying her hobbies. Nobody ever approached her either, but she didn't mind. She wasn't desperate for friends.

Becoming a fly on the wall was something that Tatsuko had no problem with, even if her parents did.

Then one day, another girl approached her.

"Hey, watcha' reading?"

At first Tatsuko didn't aknowledge it. Nobody had ever called out to her, and it was recess, so there should be lots of kids around talking to each other. It was just white noise to her.

But then the girl grabbed a chair and sat next to her.

Tatsuko looked around in shock, to see if there was someone else that this girl was trying to talk to.

The girl then took a look at Tatsuko's Manga.

"Whoa, you read that, too? What's your favorite chapter?" she asked.

"Er… huh? A-Are you talking to me?" asked Tatsuko.

"Yeah! You're reading my favorite Manga, of course I'm talking to you. Anyways, my favorite chapter was when Taro met that giant ox robot, and they had to fight him. For once, I actually thought he was in danger, y'know?" said the other girl, smiling.

"Oh… yeah, I remember that. Actually, there's… a couple of versions. I used to read the old ones that my dad has… This is the latest one."

"What? No way, you've got vintage Manga? Cool! Oh, I'm Kaori, by the way!"

This was a first. For the first time in her life, Tatsuko was nervous. This girl had suddenly reached out to her. Most of her experience with people had been bad ones, unless they were school related, so…

…This was… new.

Tatsuko shook Kaori's hands, and Kaori replied with a grin.

"Well, it's nice to meetcha, er… smiling girl?" said Kaori with a wink.

"Uh, oh… Um, yeah… Tatsuko."

"Tatsuko, it's kinda hard to roll off the tongue, what about, Ta-Chan?"

"Huh?"

Tatsuko had never actually been given a nickname, certainly not a *-Chan* nickname, so again, this was all so sudden.

And just like that, Tatsuko believed that she had just made her first real friend in a long time.

Kaori constantly tried to get her other friends to hang out with Tatsuko, but their unwillingness, as well as Tatsuko's unwillingness, prevented that from happening.

Kaori would also try and get Tatsuko to try out new things, to which Tatsuko would just sheepishly reply that she didn't feel like it.

However, Kaori did have an affect on Tatsuko. Tatsuko did feel a bit more confident, if only because someone that was so outgoing like Kaori actually gave someone like Tatsuko a chance.

Tatsuko became more confident in herself. She also became a bit more attached to Kaori, willing to talk about everything with Kaori. She was the one friend who Tatsuko felt like she could trust.

"Ta-Chan, y'know what drew me in to all those Manga and stuff?"

"What?"

“The fact that I know that somehow… I could *be* someone that could help people, y’know?”

“Sounds like a lot of work”

“But it’s worth it, right? I mean, if you think about it.”

“I guess”

“Don’t you want to try being a hero, too?” said Kaori with a smile.

Tatsuko thought about her answer for a while.

“That would be nice…”

And now Tatsuko had become the Magical Girl Postarie.

Kaori didn’t break her promise. As soon as Kaori became Rain Pou, she set out to work and became active.

Postarie, however, was the passive one. Thinking on whether or not she should get involved with these dangerous situations. However, Rain Pou was right, she could help a lot of people with these powers.

Maybe, once all this is over, Postarie could settle for more peaceful ways to help people.

But for now, she was surrounded by Rain Pou and Mao Pam. Walking around the city.

The coats that Mao Pam gave them were apparently for protection. In a way, Postarie did feel more secure in this coat, as if Mao Pam herself had given a part of her.

For most of the trip, Mao Pam had asked them plenty of questions, but the one that always answered them was Rain Pou. She was quick on her feet and on her tongue. She knew what to say, and if there was fear that she had for Mao Pam, she didn’t show it.

Suddenly, Mao Pam stopped in her tracks.

“Did you two hear that?” she asked.

Neither Rain Pou nor Postarie heard anything. Certainly nothing nearby.

The both of them shook their heads. Mao Pam focused.

“Understandable. You’re new, your senses aren’t as developed yet. But I heard a car crash, somewhere in the city.”

“And…?” asked Rain pou.

“A car crash this late in the middle of the night, two at a time. With some distance. Might be worth investigating.”

Just then, Mao Pam’s coat, or a layer of it, flew upwards, and a large eyeball popped out from the black winged sheet.

It then flew away, zooming off into the distance, as Mao Pam closed her eyes and waited. After a few moments, Mao Pam spoke,

“One, Two, Three, Four, Five people… and Hana. Damn, they got to her. Mana’s not going to be happy.”

Eyes still closed, her expression soured. Whatever’s going on, it must be bad for Mao Pam. Pam then continued one,

“Guitar Magical Girl, Swordsman Magical Girl, Pale white patchwork dress Magical Girl, Fortune-Teller Magical Girl, and a Wedding Dress Magical Girl. Know any of them?” asked Pam to the both of them.

“Wedding Dress?” asked Postarie.

“That’s Wedin! Wedin’s there?” exclaimed Rain Pou.

“A friend of yours?”

“She is, wait… What’s she doing?” asked Rain Pou.

“She’s chumming around with the swordsman it seems,” answered Pam.

“What? We don’t know any of those people. What’s going on?” said Rain Pou with a worried look on her face.

“Um… Mao Pamn, you wouldn’t happen to see a pirate, or… a magician? An Arabian looking genie?” asked Postarie.

“No, just the wedding dress girl, Hana, and 4 others I’m not familiar with.”

“What? I don’t like this,” said Rain Pou.

Mao Pam chuckled and smiled. A dangerous looking smile.

“So your friend *and* mine are together with 4 Magical Girls that none of us know. Interesting. What *are* they up to?”

With a grin, she looked at the two girls,

“Let’s find out then, shall we?”

Chapter 9:
The Devil in Flames

☆ Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 11 Hours, 20 Minutes)

“Stay here,” said Pam, as she brought their coats back to her. Their coats transformed into Mao Pam’s wings, and off she flew away.

Presumably, she was checking on that crash that she said she heard before.

Once Mao Pam was safely out of earshot, Toko poked her head out from Postarie’s chest pocket.

“Oh my god, she’s finally gone…” said Toko, sweating as she finally had enough time to relax.

“Kaori, what do we do?” asked Postarie, nervous and afraid.

The two of them were in an abandoned alleyway, with what seemed to be a used up vending machine, busted and broken.

Close by to the crash site where Mao Pam wanted to see, but still far enough that she couldn’t possibly hear them.

“What do you mean, Ta-Chan?” replied Rain Pou.

“I think… I think we should tell her,” said Postarie, nervously.

“Tell her? Her who? Tell her what?”

“Mao Pam. Tell her… Tell her everything”

“*What*!? Have you gone crazy or something! What the hell’s gotten into you lately, Postarie?” yelled out Toko, her hand movements getting wilder as her face became red with anger.

“Hey, hey! Toko, calm down,” said Rain Pou.

“Calm down? Your friend’s about to sell us out! I can’t just calm down!”

“I just… I don’t think Mao Pam’s that bad… She seems like she wants to protect us.”

“Oh my god, how gullible *are* you!? Okay, I’ll cut you some slack since you’re pretty much a newbie, but Mao Pam is *bad news*. She won’t hesitate to kill you if given the chance,” said Toko.

“Well…”

“Well? Well *what*? She wants *me*! You tell her about me, she kills me, she doesn’t need you anymore, and then guess who’s she’s gonna kill, *you*! Believe me, you are *not* ready for Mao Pam.”

“I just-”

“I just *what*? You’re just committing suicide is what you’ll do if you snitch. I gave you your powers and *this* is how you plan to use it!?”

“Toko, that’s enough!” said Rain Pou, unable to let this continue on.

Postarie’s pose began slumping to the wall. It’s clear she’s not in any form of power in the argument. She looked like she was about to cry.

“Ta-Chan-”

“Toko… Just tell me one thing. Is what Mao Pam said true? Just… tell us,” said Postarie, holding back her tears.

Toko blinked for a second, unsure of how to answer.

“You want to ask me if I think *I’m* the bad guy? Look, I never did anything wrong. What the hell can *I* do, I’m just a Fairy! I give powers to people like you! I haven’t done anything to warrant being killed!”

“I still think… we should tell the truth. Kaori, please…” said Postarie to Rain Pou, pleading with her.

“Y’know what, you wanna find out what Mao Pam’s *really* capable of? Fine. Let’s go there. Looks like she’s about to get in a fight. Once you see what she’s capable of, you’ll never think twice about avoiding her,” said Toko as she hid back inside Rain Pou’s chest pocket.

Rain Pou sighed and nodded, and both of them headed over to the direction Pam was going towards.

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 53 Minutes)**

The car distraction worked. The plan had worked and the team had escaped into the city on foot.

Mana had enchanted their car to crash towards the furthest barrier entry, which should give them enough time to escape.

Despite their safety, Hime couldn’t help but think of one thing.
Frederica’s powers.

This person named Pythie Frederica had the power to see them by grabbing a strand of their hair, at least according to Ripple.

So logically, the question would be, where did Frederica get Hime’s hair?

She thought that she had encountered her before. Maybe as a human. Ripple told her that if a normal human encounters a Magical Girl, their memories of the events will be fuzzy at best.

Ripple told her the details of Frederica.

She has a crystal ball, long flowing black hair, a light brown jacket, with a hoodie and some horn-shaped decorations on it. Her jacket was adorned with decorative stars.

Nothing like that matched anything Hime had seen before. She was certain that she'd never met this Frederica person.

Ripple also told her that Frederica collected hair. She also told her that when Frederica was imprisoned, it was confiscated.

If that's true, then two possibilities exist,

Frederica collected her hair collection back, and somehow, Hime's hair was part of the collection.

Or Frederica found Hime's hair somewhere.

But if the second was true, where would she even find traces of her hair? She didn't want to think too hard about it.

She was afraid of what that implied.

Why didn't her father answer the phone? Did Frederica somehow find out her address and kill him?

Her heartrate increased, but walking with the Investigation team slightly calmed her down.

Mana led the way, using her wand to detect traces of magic. Piggybacking 7753 in order to keep up, the Magical Girls ran as fast as they can, following Mana's directions.

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 11 Hours, 12 Minutes)**

A Magical Girl had been floating in the sky. Her form was sleek, yet she emanated a powerful aura.

From behind her spread four wings, although to the common observer, you wouldn't call them wings. They looked more like four black rectangular sheets.

Despite the moonlight painting the Magical Girl in silhouette, her horns and red eyes were enough to tell Pythie who she was.

She didn't expect her to be here.

Mao Pam, the ultimate weapon. Hers was a name that almost anyone who was in the Land of Magic today would know of. Especially since the Clamberry scandal broke out.

She was, after all, her mentor.

The sheer power that she exerted was known throughout the Land of Magic, so much so that she earned her nickname of the Ultimate Weapon.

Pythie Frederica would consider her the ideal Magical Girl, except for one thing, she mentored Clamberry, which means nobody in the Land of Magic would follow her lead.

The taint of a mentor is harder to remove than that of a victim.

Still, the door was always open. The problem is getting her to agree with Pythie.

Pythie felt many emotions when looking at Mao Pam.

Awe

Jealousy

Anger

Desire.

She was both everything she wanted in a Magical Girl yet at the same time, she was unobtainable.

Her silvery hair shone in the moonlight, short, bobcut hair, with some bangs. If Pythie could grab hold of that hair, if she could just hold it within her hands, she could already taste it.

"Master… you're drooling," said Tot Pop.

"Hm? Oh, pardon me."

Mao Pam descended downwards, arms folded. Pukin stepped forward, backed up by Sonia Bean.

“Magical Girls in cars. Now that’s something I wouldn’t expect to see. I see we have ourselves a little accident,” said Mao Pam.

“You came here out of the blue and expect us to just welcome you with warm arms?” said Pukin, unfazed by Pam’s presence.

“Ah, you speak English,” said Pam. She then switched her language immediately,

“That explains the car model. A *Plymouth Fury*. Classic choice. Shame it’s wrecked now, though.”

“A shame indeed. I loved the car, saw it in a movie once.”

“A movie featuring a Fury? The only one I can think of is *Christine*. John Carpenter, wonderful director. In fact, he directed one of my favorite horror films, it involved an outsider, infiltrating a group, and disguising itself, as the group kills each other to find it. Sound familiar?”

“I see your taste is quite refined, and you’re polite, I’ll give you that. But small talk won’t change anything. You’re here to fight us, aren’t you?”

“Why go straight to violence? Uncivilized I would say. I assume you’re not from Japan then. Your accent is near-perfect English. Where are you from? Europe? America? Or maybe I’m mistaken and you’re Australian?”

“Where I’m from doesn’t matter, stranger. It seems *you* are a woman of many languages as well.”

“My name is Mao Pam, of the Foreign Affairs Division in the Land of Magic. So yes, I would say I would know many languages”

“An introduction for an introduction then? My name is Pukin, Shogun Pukin. I *used* to be from the Land of Magic,”

“Expelled?”

“Arrested”

“Ah, so you’re a criminal”

“Unjustly tried”

“Yes, I’m sure you’re completely innocent,”

“And who are *you* to decide?”

“The most powerful Magical Girl within the Foreign Affairs Division. I have a purpose here. *You*, however, don’t belong in this quarantine.”

“You boast of power, yet I have yet to recognize your deeds or your name!”

“Your speech sounds fairly old. How long were you imprisoned? 1800s I assume?”

“Oh I’ve had plenty of time to walk the modern world thanks to your corrupt Land of Magic. Using me to kill those they didn’t even want to lay their hands on,” said Pukin as she unsheathed her Rapier, pointing it towards Pam.

“And so the first strike is drawn, Shogun Pukin.”

As the two were talking, Pythie and Tot retreated back to their car, Tot Pop wanted to grab Hana, who was still bound and gagged, but Mao Pam’s wings suddenly approached them, grabbed Hana, and flew away.

“Now now, we’re having a nice talk here. Your friends back there won’t need a *hostage*, certainly?”

Pukin didn’t react. Instead, she sheathed her rapier again.

“You won’t be fighting *me* today, Mao Pam. Sonia! I’ll leave this one to you,”

Sonia Bean stepped forward, a black haze constantly following her hands. She stood and glared at Mao Pam.

“You wish to *fight* me?” asked Pam.

Sonia Bean nodded.

“Ah, it’s to the death then?”

Sonia Bean nodded again.

“Hahaha, wonderful! You seem… *powerful*. I haven’t had a life or death battle in a long time. I should warn your friends. If they interfere, I’ll kill them myself. Tell me, what’s your name?” said Mao Pam as she grinned and began to float upwards.

“Sonia Bean.”

“Sonia Bean! Today will be a fight of the ages! I sense your power, and will match you with mine! A fight between Magical Girls to see… who among us… is the *strongest*!”

Mao Pam zoomed towards the air, gaining some distance, and Sonia Bean simply nodded, and rushed towards the streets ahead, headed directly towards Pam.

☆ **Mao Pam (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 53 Minutes)**

First thing’s first. Hana needs to be safe. Pam used one wing to carry her back. She had commanded the wing to take her someplace safe. The alleyway where she left the two newbies is the only place she could think of right now.

Secondly, this is possibly a 4-on-1 fight, despite Sonia Bean being the one sent to fight Pam. She can’t ignore Pukin or the other two in the back.

Thirdly, Pam can’t retreat to the city, or use anything too destructive. There are innocent people in town, and Pam wasn’t sent to kill random bystanders.

Lots of handicaps. Still, the power that Pam sensed within Sonia was amazing. This girl is someone who would kill. She knew she’d be in for a serious fight.

Her heart began pumping. Mao Pam had always been seeking to fight the strongest opponent, and she might find her answer here.

Pam flew high, because Sonia can’t fly. Her wings are her only advantage. 3 Wings left, 1 was carrying Hana. As long as she’s high up, Sonia can’t possibly reach her.

But Sonia is running really fast. She’s building up speed in order to jump.

Many newbie Magical Girls can’t react fast. Their senses aren’t trained yet. People like Mao Pam, and, she suspects, Sonia as well, can react to the quickest change in battle.

Brute force was never always the answer. The smartest Magical Girl will win the day.

At this speed, Sonia would hurt herself if she hit into a wall. However, assuming she reacted to the wall fast enough, she'd try to climb onto it. Think two steps ahead, Pam.

"Hadraniel!" shouted Pam.

1 of her wings immediately widened to the size of the pavement, and its thickness was durable enough that it could withstand a nuke. It placed itself in Sonia's path, a sudden wall against a speeding Magical Girl. If Sonia didn't stop, she'd crush herself in the wall.

But Sonia, though shocked, immediately jumped towards the wall, intending to traverse it. Pam expected this.

"Longinus!"

Another of her wings formed itself into a spear, and flew behind Sonia, intent on impaling her. The speed of which was at the blink of an eye.

Sonia jumped off the wall, propelling herself backwards, backflipped to avoid the spear as it pierced the wall. She then landed on the hilt, and used that to jump forwards in an angle headed straight towards Pam.

Pam had inadvertently made it easier for Sonia to reach her.

1 Wing left. Pam immediately released all effort of flying, and flipped her body to avoid Sonia. Instead of punching her, Sonia seemed to be reaching out to grasp for her. Pam narrowly avoided Sonia as she flung herself away, though Sonia managed to grab hold of some strands of Pam's hair.

Pam saw a black haze where she was before, as Sonia rolled to balance her landing. It seemed like Sonia had the power to disintegrate. Meaning Pam can't touch her.

How do you win a fight when everything that touches your enemy is disintegrated?

☆ **7753 (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 48 Minutes)**

Whilst running around the city, Mana had been leading 7753 towards where she felt the most magic.

That's when she saw a strange sight. A black sphere was carrying what seemed to be Hana.

Mana widened her eyes. “Hana? That’s *Hana*!”

7753 nodded. She and the rest of the group ran to follow the black spheroid. It seemed to descend somewhere near a building.

Mana focused her wand to point in the direction of the sphere, and after jumping across a few rooftops, they found the sphere gently placing Hana, bound and gagged, in the ground, slumped next to a broken vending machine.

“Quick, untie her. Oh god, Hana…” said Mana.

7753 unbounded her, while Ripple used her Kunai to cut the ropes tying her up.

She had blindfolds, earmuffs, and her right ear seemed to be bleeding and torn. Her face was bloodied, and there were signs of bruises all over her.

“Hana, what happened? Who did this? Frederica? The assassin?” asked Mana.

Hana slowly opened her eyes.

“Mana… Heh… Never thought I’d see you again. Ngh…”

“Don’t talk, okay. I’ll heal you up. Just relax, alright?” said Mana as she pulled out her wand. A light came out from the wand, and she focused it on Hana’s injuries.

“Argh… Nggh… Okay, that stings. Thought Mages could do less… painful healings,”

“Sorry, Hana.”

“Nono, it’s fine, hehe… Ngh… Honestly, I’m just glad I’m back again.”

“Did Frederica do this?”

“She and… some others, yeah. Ngh…”

So the information was true. There were others. 7753 then received instructions from her mentor once more.

Be careful. Hana’s attackers could be nearby.

“Do you know where Pam is?” asked 7753.

“Uh… I don’t know much. Ngh, I was blindfolded, muffs. Must be magical. Couldn’t hear or see a thing.”

“Hana… Sorry to break this to you, but your right ear’s too damaged. I… It’s going to cause problems. We’re going to have to amputate it.”

“Oh… Well… I can’t hear from there anymore, anyways. Haha, looks like I’m gonna be just like you, huh, Ripple?”

“This isn’t the time for jokes, Hana,” said Mana.

“Haha… Laughter never hurt anyone, Mana. Lighten up… of course, laughing kinda hurts a bit, so you might have a point, haha… Ngh.”

Mana moved her wand over to Hana’s right ear. “I’m sorry. I’ll make this as painless as I can.”

Ripple knelt down and held Hana’s hand. Hana gripped tightly as Mana performed her operation.

“NGRH!!! Mmmph…”

“Okay, all done.”

“Ngaah… Hah… I think… I need to lay down a bit.”

“I made sure it’s not bleeding, so it’s okay. Just rest, Hana,” said Mana. Ripple nodded as well, agreeing silently.

Ripple noticed the black sphere flying away. “That one of ours?”

“I think that might be Pam’s magic,” suggested 7753.

“I’m following it. Look after Hana. I’ll find Pam. It’ll probably lead me back to her.”

“Ripple!” said Mana.

Ripple looked back.

Mana sighed, “Just… don’t get yourself killed or hurt. We’re scattered as we are.”

Ripple nodded and chased after the black sphere.

☆ **Mao Pam (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 39 Minutes)**

“Gehenna!”

One of Pam’s wings lit up into flames and began spreading around, becoming a large fireball headed towards Sonia.

Sonia simply reached both of her hands out, and the fireball all dissipated when reached her. Pieces of Pam’s wings reformed again.

“Logos!”

One of her wings moved ahead to emit a large soundwave, strong enough to pierce someone’s ears, aimed at Sonia. Sonia again held her hands out, and the soundwaves didn’t affect her at all.

“Lucifer!”

A bright light that would blind someone shone towards Sonia, but the light turned hazy black as it hit her hands.

“Minos!”

Pam’s wings blew gusts of wind, which Sonia ignored, again, due to her disintegration of the winds that reached her.

“Echidna”

Pam’s wings emitted miasma, poison that could kill someone if they inhaled it. But Sonia once more covered her nose and disintegrated any trace of miasma breathing towards her.

“Cocytus!”

Freezing the arena did nothing as well, since any cool air that touches Sonia disintegrates.

Damn it.

Damn it!

How do you beat someone who can't be touched by anything? This is a battle of attrition, something that Pam can't win normally.

She has to think outside of the box. Pam is the strongest Magical Girl, but strength isn't everything when it comes to fighting. She had to find a way to kill Sonia…

…Without touching her.

One of Pam's wings came back to her. Meaning Hana's safe now. 4 wings.

4 wings able to be transformed into anything. The maximum limit of Pam's wings is 4. She needs at least 1 to fly.

Sacrifice flight to use all 4 wings. If she does so, she'll be in danger of being in Sonia's reach.

Whatever she's about to do, she has to do it fast, since Sonia is preparing once more to attack, waiting if Pam wants to unleash another move.

Sacrifice flight… or not?

Damn. Let's hope this works.

"Mastema"

One of Pam's wings transformed into a gigantic drill. She then aimed it towards the ground around Sonia.

Sonia was confused, as she was prepared to defend herself against the drill, but Pam's wings weren't aiming for Sonia.

The drill began to cut a wide circular hole around Sonia, in a large 30-meter diameter. Then, the drill transformed itself into a large object and stomped the ground downwards, bringing the asphalt that Sonia was standing on downwards.

The resulting hole was deep enough below that Pam could safely head inside and not have to worry about the other 3.

Sonia felt groggy after dropping down the hole, but now Pam joined her in the pit.

Pam had the wing that was the drill cover the entrance to the hole, sealing them both inside, underground.

Confined to a 30-meter space, disadvantage to Pam, as Sonia could easily rush her here. Magical Girls didn't care about darkness. They can see in the dark.

Sonia's pale dress and skin, and Pam's red eyes shone in the darkness.

"It's just you and me, Sonia. Have you ever wondered what Hell is like?"

Sonia didn't answer. She lunged forward to Pam, and Pam avoided it by flying over Sonia, using her wings to strike Sonia, but as it touched her skin, part of her wing disintegrated.

Pam was lucky she hadn't kicked her, or her leg would've been gone.

Next step. 3 wings remaining.

Pam turned one of her wings into liquid, making sure to make it flammable. The liquid was spread throughout the pit, and despite it disintegrating whenever part of it touches Sonia's leg, that was never the point.

"Gehenna."

Another wing became flame, and a sea of fire lit the pit. The two Magical Girls were surrounded by a flaming inferno. However, the flames weren't meant for Sonia.

Sonia looked confused, but focused on Pam, attempting to attack her. Pam was fast, managing to dodge, but never attacking back.

The last wing was used to form a suit, covering all of Mao Pam's body in black armor.

This keeps Pam from being burnt by her own flames, as she increased the flames tremendously.

"You think you're invincible just because you're untouchable, Sonia Bean!?"

Sonia lunged at Pam, Pam slid away into the flames, jumping in, knowing she won't be hurt with her armor.

The flames grew more intense.

“I’m the Ultimate Weapon. The strongest Magical Girl. I didn’t get that name for nothing.”

Pam’s voice echoed as smoke began to form. Sonia searched for Pam in the flames and smoke, and lunged whenever she thought she found her, only to miss once again.

“I can kill you without even *touching* you.”

“RAAAAAARGH!”

Sonia was enraged as she tried to find Pam, the pit now covered in smoke, flames everywhere. Intense heat that Sonia didn’t feel because of her powers. However… Sonia didn’t have to feel pain.

Pam’s plan was never to hurt Sonia, it was to tire her out.

Fire burns oxygen, and Sonia wouldn’t disintegrate the oxygen she needed to breathe. That would be suicidal.

Therefore, cut off the oxygen, tire her out. Make her angry. Make her tire herself out.

The lack of oxygen will confuse her brain. Once she passes out, she won’t be able to use her powers.

Pam’s suit both provided her with oxygen and prevented her from being burnt.

“Welcome to Hell, Sonia Bean.”

Sonia began to lose her breath, dropping to all fours. Then, she saw a silhouette of Mao Pam, laughing, and covered by smoke. It seemed like she didn’t see her.

Sonia’s eyes widened and she lunged. She crashed into the figure and pinned her to the wall, passing through the flames, and she used all her remaining strength to pierce through the figure’s stomach, as it disintegrated.

But that was not Pam. That was one of her wings. Mao Pam had removed the seal in the hole. The wing used to seal them in had transformed into a perfect copy of Pam’s armor, only it’s hollow.

Because Pam was in the black armor, Sonia wouldn't be able to tell the difference with her oxygen-deprived brain, and the smoke. With the last of her energy wasted on Pam's wings, Sonia began to collapse.

And now… She will die.

Pam moved her liquid wings to cover Sonia's body. No reaction. Perfect. And now…

The flames.

"GHAAAAAAAAARGH"

By the time Sonia screamed awakening, it was too late. Pam had already begun to burn her body, and there was no turning back for Sonia, despite how much strength she may have.

Her body had been burnt to a crisp. Sonia Bean was dead.

As the flames rose from the pit, Pam removed her suit, transformed it back into her wings, and flew back upwards, landing on the pavement.

3 Wings. The 4th was disintegrated. She'll have to make a new one.

As soon as she landed, two Magical Girls attempted to pincer attack her. Pukin, and the fortune-teller.

Pam blocked the Pukin's rapier with her wings, and the fortune teller's kick with her elbow. She kicked the fortune teller in the side, and she flew away towards a building.

The guitarist played her electronic guitar and large notes zoomed towards Pam, which Pam blocked with another wing, focusing on both her and Pukin.

Pam grabbed some distance. She turned one of her wings into a humanoid black creature, intent on keeping the fortune teller and guitarist busy.

She now had 2 wings left. One for defense, one for flight.

Pukin looked at Pam with rage.

"You killed her!!!" said Pukin.

"You sent her to her death," replied Pam.

Pukin then did something strange. She took her rapier and used it to scratch herself in the cheek.

Pam then noticed a wedding dress girl gasp. Looking around, and running away in the background.

What's with the sword?

Pukin smiled, and advanced towards Pam. Whatever she did, Pam knew not to let herself be hit by the sword.

Pukin slashed and stabbed, but Pam dodged and weaved, attempting to take the sword away from Pukin, using her wings to block the undodgeable strikes.

Find the right moment to attack. Wait for Pukin to stab. Wait for her to make a mistake.

Now!

When Pam predicted that Pukin would stab her, she used her wings to block the stab, but made the wings soft enough that her rapier would be pushed into the wing. Then, she hardened it, and threw it away, removing Pukin's rapier.

However, as soon as Pam threw away the wing, Pukin punched her, with a strength that she hadn't experienced in a long time.

Despite Pukin using a rapier, which Pam associated with agility, Pukin's strength is pretty high as well. Pukin punched Pam once more, but this time Pam was ready, and blocked her punch.

Pam replied with a knee to Pukin's stomach, an elbow, and a flurry of punches towards Pukin's body and face.

Pukin then pulled out a stiletto, attempting to surprise Pam. Pam dodged the first strike by ducking, and when Pukin attempted to bring the stiletto down towards Pam's head, she caught it with her hand, aiming the thrust at Pukin's own thighs.

The stiletto stabbed Pukin in the thigh, but Pukin didn't react with pain. Pam then pushed the stiletto deeper, and grabbed Pukin by the neck, headbutting her, aiming for the bridge of her nose.

The headbutt threw Pukin off balance as she fell backwards, her nose bleeding, her face bruised, her thighs dripping with blood.

Pukin stood up, pulled out the stiletto from her thigh, again, not reacting at all. Only laughing.

“Haha… You think you’ll break me with pain? That’s not going to work anymore, Pam.”

In the background, the fortune-teller and the guitarist were still fighting the humanoid that Pam created. However, Pukin suddenly widened her eyes in surprise.

Pam was confused, but Pukin grinned, and suddenly jumped out of the way.

From the back, the guitarist also looked shocked, and pushed away the fortune-teller towards the building nearby.

“MASTER-GKH!”

Pam felt her stomach being pierced.

…What?

She saw a blade. No, not a blade. This looked like a straight line. Thin, barely felt, but clearly piercing her. In the distance, she also saw it pierce the guitarist.

The blade had 7 colors, glowing as brightly as it did.

This was a rainbow, and Pam didn’t feel any kind of pain. She didn’t feel anything, but she was bleeding. The wound was fatal.

The rainbow then disappeared, and Pam looked behind her to find 2 Magical Girls.

Rain Pou and Postarie. Toko was peeking her head out from Rain Pou’s chest pocket. How could Pam be so stupid?

She didn’t detect her because she wasn’t focusing. She should’ve seen it. Even if she did, she wouldn’t register Rain Pou as an enemy.

Postarie was cowering with a scared looking face. Rain Pou simply looked at the two with intense eyes.

She saw the fortune-teller crawling towards a building, and Pukin running away, wounded, leaving a trail of blood.

Mao Pam coughed blood, and fell backwards as she lost consciousness.

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 20 Minutes)**

The black humanoid had collapsed, but Pythie had been hurt. She wasn't meant for combat, never was. Now things were looking bleak.

She saw her disciple dead in front of her, which made her angry. She doesn't have her crystal ball anymore, Wedin has broken free and escaped, and Pukin seems to have abandoned her.

"We actually got *Mao Pam*!" yelled a Fairy in the distance.

Pythie could barely stand up after the beating she received from Mao Pam's humanoid creature.

The rainbow girl and the postal girl approached Pythie.

"Ngh… Hear me out," said Pythie.

"No," said the rainbow girl.

Pythie was on the defensive. This girl could kill her in this state. She had to survive.

"…You're the assassin, aren't you?" asked Pythie.

The Fairy popped out of the rainbow girl's pocket,

"Pythie Frederica? *The* Pythie Frederica? The one that got caught? Never thought we'd see you in this sorry sad state. Bleeding, at the mercy of Rain Pou and me?"

"K-Kaori," said the postal girl.

"Not now," said Rain Pou as she crouched down to Pythie.

"How long have you been a Magical Girl hiding out among high school kids?" asked Pythie, grinning as she said so.

"You think your bullshit mindgame talk is going to work on me? I know how you work, Frederica. I'm going to ask you some questions, answer them or not, I'll kill you regardless," said Rain Pou.

“A shame. I’ve heard that you were responsible for training the Magical Girl Hunter. I expected something more… decent?” said Toko.

“Kaori… please don’t do anything rash,” said the postal girl.

The rainbow girl stood up, looked back at the postal girl, grabbed her by the collar, and whispered in her ear. Pythie could still listen in, however,

“I’m sorry you have to see this, but I’m not taking her hostage. I’m going to kill her. She’s dangerous,” she said as she released the postal girl, who fell down, partly out of fear.

Pythie’s heart raced slightly. She wished she had her crystal ball now.

“Who hired you to find me?” said the rainbow girl.

Pythie smiled and shrugged, “I honestly don’t know.”

The rainbow girl laughed, “So… you’re telling me you *went* here, expected to find me, and not even know who your employer is? What, were you broken out of prison or something?”

Pythie didn’t answer.

“Wow, you *were*, weren’t you? You don’t even know why you’re *here*! Just a pawn by the Land of Magic, sent to find me, Heh. Can’t believe it…”

The rainbow girl shrugged, “Well, I guess it’s settled then-”

The rainbow girl’s eyes widened, and she immediately kicked a Shuriken coming straight towards her.

A shuriken?

Dropping down from the rooftop, a ninja with a scarf and one arm. One eye scratched off as well.

Frederica chuckled at her luck, “Ripple… I wouldn’t expect to see you again.”

Ripple glanced at Pythie, “I should’ve let her kill you. That would’ve been blood off my hands. Snow wouldn’t have wanted that, though.”

“How *is* Snow White?” asked Pythie.

“Far away from you, and none of your damn business.”

The rainbow girl looked at Ripple. “You’re the girl from last night,”

“So were you. I see you went from running to killing. That’s fast.”

There was no avoiding it. These two were going to fight. If there was any time to make a plan, it was now.

☆ **Hana Gekokujou (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 15 Minutes)**

Most of Hana’s wounds had healed, but she still felt sore in her body. She instinctively reached for her right ear, but there was nothing there.

Cut in half, amputated just to be safe. She was deaf from the right side. Hana wasn’t quite used to it. She respected Ripple more for this.

She woke up next to the vending machine, with some of her teammates, Mana, 7753, and the ballerina, who seemed to have teamed up with them, are together.

Ripple had gone off to find Mao Pam. Hopefully she’s doing okay.

But then Hana heard something. Footsteps. Not Ripple’s, this one doesn’t sound like wooden flip flops. This one sounds like boots.

Process of elimination. There were drips of blood. Someone that was in a fight. Cloth. The material could potentially be an old fabric.

Pukin.

Hana hid behind the vending machine, and told the others to keep their heads down.

Pukin approached the alleyway, exhausted, holding her stomach. Blood dripping down her thighs.

Priority number one for Hana is to keep her allies safe. However, Pukin approached the alley, meaning there was no way to avoid her.

It’s now or never. If she reaches past the broken vending machine, she’ll find them all and kill them.

“I’m going out,” whispered Hana.

“What?”

“If any of you two go out, she’ll know we’re here. If I go out, she’ll assume it’s just me.”

“Hana-”

No time to argue. Pukin was approaching them. Hana rose up. Pukin’s eyes widened. Hana wouldn’t hold back against her.

Although Hana was still recovering, she could still fight. Despite her pain, she was still faster than Pukin.

She activated her powers, amplifying Pukin’s sense of touch, hoping to inflict enough pain on her.

Without even a word, Hana launched towards Pukin, tackling her away from the alley towards the streets.

Pukin reacted by pulling out her sword, but Hana dodged it easily, punching her in the ribs, slowly pushing the fight away from the alleyway.

Pukin swung wildly as Hana dodged and kicked, and dodged further and pushed her entire weight onto Pukin.

Hana was nearly tired, but she had to move Pukin away from her allies. If Ripple or Mao Pam could arrive, they’d be safer. Both Mana and 7753 weren’t suited for combat.

Strange, Pukin should’ve reacted to the pain, but she only grunted and continued to attack Hana.

Hana grabbed Pukin’s face, which was broken and bloody, and rammed it onto a wall.

Pukin groaned, and Hana continued to trade blows with the swordsman.

Hana’s furious punches and kicks were being endured by Pukin, and Hana exerting her energy to keep up her magic is tiring her, but it didn’t seem to have any effect on Pukin.

Then, in a moment of pain from her ear and a headache from her body still not recovering, Pukin took her chance.

She plunged a stiletto straight towards Hana's chest, and collapsed in the street, using her arms to support herself.

Hana felt the stiletto enter her chest, the blood soaking her kimono red. She could hear Mana's crying screams being muffled, probably by 7753.

That's when Hana noticed the scratches on Pukin's cheek. Sword scratches. From what she remembered, she used that sword as a brainwashing sword.

Perhaps it was more accurate to call it a mind-altering sword. Since Pukin knew Hana's magic, that meant…

…Pukin brainwashed herself to feel no pain.

Pukin stood up, and began to walk away towards the distance.

Hana gave them enough time. She smiled as she collapsed in the street.

As a few seconds passed and Pukin was out of earshot, the rest of the group came out towards Hana.

"Hana, no, no, no… please, no. Not after we just got you back. I just got you back, Hana. Hana! *Hana*!!!" screamed Mana.

She was in tears, and 7753 as well. The ballerina girl looked from behind them.

"Hana, don't do this… no, Hana, why did you have to jump out. Hana…"

Mana pulled out her wand, but it was no use, as the wound had already settled in and was fatal.

Hana held out her hand to Mana, smiling. Mana took it with both of her hands.

She was safe. She trusts Ripple. She trusts 7753. She trusts everyone to keep Mana safe, and she trusts Mana to keep her team safe.

Hana held Mana's hand tightly.

She trusts Mana. Knowing that she protected her so far is enough.

"I can't do this without you, Hana… Don't leave me alone…" said Mana in a weak voice.

"…Not alone," said Hana, pointing to 7753 and the ballerina, smiling as she looked at Mana's face, red and full of tears.

Hana's chest hurts, her body was feeling cold. It was time to let go.

She smiled one last time, as the last thing she felt was Mana hugging her, keeping her warm as consciousness left her body.

Chapter 10:
Walking on Rainbows

☆ **Toko (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 13 Minutes)**

Mao Pam is dead.

With her out of the way, no one could challenge Rain Pou. This was great, Toko had been afraid that Mao Pam would've found her out.

But Rain Pou always kept her cool around Mao Pam, and never revealed Toko's location. Their relationship was built on trust, and they've been partners long enough to work off one another.

Rain Pou had managed to deceive Mao Pam. Her reckless behavior, making herself look like a newbie Magical Girl, all of that was to give a false sense of security.

Mao Pam was someone who would be careful of strength, and the more competent you show yourself to be, the more she would keep an eye on you.

Rain Pou challenged all that by trying to defy Pam with clearly failing tactics. Attempting to look brave for her friend, trying to play the supporting strong role.

By playing the rebellious play, Rain Pou also deflected any suspicions on her motives.

While Postarie would be considered someone who would be timid and scared, that leaves room for suspicion.

Because someone who was timid and scared could potentially awaken their inner bravery and become dangerous.

However, Rain Pou played her cards right with Pam. She was gung-ho, she rebelled, she tried to fight back, but failed.

This showed Pam that Rain Pou wasn't afraid to fight back, but it also gave her a false measurement of Rain Pou's potential. After all, if you really *did* want to fight back, why hold back?

And it wasn't like Rain Pou was hiding her true power as well. Rain Pou could never outmatch Mao Pam in a straight up fight.

But fights don't always win. Sometimes the smartest tactic is to wait for the opportune moment. Strength isn't everything.

When they arrived, Pam was fighting off the swordsman. Rain Pou waited, waited until it was the perfect moment. Waited until everyone was weakened.

This was the nature of deception. This is why survival of the fittest will never be true. It's not survival of the fittest in this world, it's survival of the smartest.

The one that takes the opportunity will beat the one that lost the advantage.

That's when she struck, and it was a very perfect strike.

Rain Pou's rainbows were thin, yet at the same time they were durable enough that a magical girl can stand on them without fail.

Their sharpness is as sharp as a blade, easily able to cut through most objects.

Rainbows are made of light, and so they are weightless, yet at the same time, they are solid, and cannot be broken. The rainbows can withstand a magical girl strike.

Thin, yet thick.

Light, yet solid.

Soft, yet sharp.

Contradictions. This was Rain Pou's true personality. Contradictions.

None of her personalities were false. It was true that she had planned to outplay Pam from the beginning, but it was also true that she couldn't possibly fight her.

It was true that she was faking most of her attempts to rebel against Pam, but it was also true that she was afraid and trying to escape.

Two things, opposites, yet both are true.

This was the Magical Girl that Toko had sought out. The Magical Girl that she entrusted to become her partner.

Toko had planned everything out with Rain Pou. If at any time, Rain Pou had to be forced into a situation where the Examination Division would try to capture them, then the Namiyama students will be transformed into Magical Girls.

Rain Pou was also told by Toko to never go solo. Rain Pou knew this. If at any point the High School students suspected Rain Pou, then she'd be at a disadvantage.

However, they wouldn't be experienced Magical Girls yet, so if Rain Pou was always partnered with someone… someone like Postarie…

Then Rain Pou could easily take Postarie hostage. The students wouldn't be able to fight off Rain Pou.

Everything was planned. It was a contingency. This was always the plan.

The plan has been going well so far. Mao Pam has now died, and now Pythie Frederica was about to die as well.

But then the ninja showed up.

Rain Pou will just have to kill her like she would anyone else.

☆ **Ripple (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 12 Minutes)**

Too late. Ripple was too late.

Ripple ran as fast as she could, but by the time she got here, there was already a gigantic hole in the street, what seemed like 2 bodies were on the ground, and Pythie Frederica was about to be killed.

Frederica was about to be killed.

I should… I should wait.

But she couldn't. She couldn't let someone die.

Should wait until she was dead, then go after the killer.

No, that's not what Snow White would do in her position. Ripple already decided she would change, that she would be a better person.

Waiting for the opportune moment. Playing dirty. Worse, murdering.

Swim Swim

Calamity Mary

She didn't want to become like them. She wasn't them.

Damn it!

She threw her Shuriken, distracting the rainbow dressed Magical Girl. She jumped down. She recognized this girl. Earlier that night, she had tried to chase her. She wasn't trying to hurt her that night because she considered her a regular student.

But now this girl had the eyes of a killer. She could tell by the way the girl was standing.

She went from 'Potentially Dangerous' to 'Obvious Killer'.

She also saw behind her, a scared postal service girl. It didn't look like she belonged here. She was innocent in all this.

"Leave," said the rainbow girl.

"Leave? We just met earlier."

"If you want to stay alive, leave."

“Cocky for someone who got beaten before. I’m not here to kill you”

“But you’re here to arrest me, right? Then what? Land of Magic prison? It’ll just be off your hands once you’re all done with it, isn’t it?”

“Your own damn fault for killing people.”

“I don’t deny that. Which is why I’m telling you to leave, or you won’t be able to leave again.”

Ripple prepared her Katana, gripping it as she was ready to move.

She then saw 3 rainbows shoot towards her. Her reaction speed was fast, Ripple backflipped away, landing on the rainbows.

As she did, by chance, she saw a rainbow from the top. She immediately side-stepped it.

They make no sound

The rainbows had no way to be detected other than vision. Because they acted like light, they made no audible noises.

All of Ripple’s 5 senses had to be focused. She could’ve died immediately there. She took out her Shuriken and Kunai. Now the real battle begins.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 11 Minutes)**

Kaori Ninotsugi lived with her sister.

At least, she thinks it’s her sister. She’s always seen her that way, but Kaori wouldn’t be surprised if she was adopted.

When she was too young to remember, her parents had died. At least, that’s what her sister told her.

For some reason, her sister didn’t get into college because she had to take the workload that their parents had died. Her sister had to work, study, and pay for both her and Kaori’s school.

Her sister was considered a nice person… by everyone else. She had a cheerful personality, and she was helpful.

But that was her on the outside.

Her sister hated Kaori, and Kaori hated her sister too.

She had blamed Kaori for a lot of their problems. It looked like she was projecting them all into Kaori.

Her sister didn't get accepted into college due to funds, which she blamed on having to spend it all on Kaori. To her, Kaori was a problem child that she never wanted, never gave birth to regardless, and was stuck with.

When her sister had a hard day at work, or was particularly berated, she would beat Kaori. She'd scold Kaori, she wouldn't feed Kaori.

"Just because mom and dad died doesn't give you a reason to be such a bitch to me! It's in the past! Get over it!" said Kaori one day.

That day, Kaori was beaten harder than she had before. So hard that the marks still stained on her back. But she couldn't fight back.

Kaori also had to maintain a good look at school, so that she wouldn't be investigated by anyone. Kaori tried to call social services, but her sister was just such a good person on the outside, they couldn't find any evidence otherwise.

Her marks were explained as bruises she got at school, and to them, it looked like Kaori was a rebellious kid to begin with, who could probably lie.

Her sister was very good at this, and then after that incident, Kaori had to endure being locked in her room, starving.

Every single thing she tried to fight back with always ended in failure, and despite all she tried, she would just keep being punished for it.

At school, Kaori put on a happy smile, a good personality. She had to. But she couldn't be the best at what she can do.

Kaori was punished if she won an award, as her sister thought it meant she outperformed her. At the same time, she can't do something worse too, because it reflected badly on her sister.

Kaori had to settle for ‘just right’.

She knew how to hide her emotions and feelings, well enough that she wouldn’t get physically abused, but she still tried to find something, *anything* she could do to fight back with.

Then, in middle school, she was visited by a Fairy.

She thought it was some kind of delusional dream. Why was a Fairy here right now? Did her sister drug her or something?

But the Fairy spoke.

“My name’s Toko. I’ve had my eye on you for a while now. Did you ever want to be a real Magical Girl?”

“What?”

“You have the potential to become one. I can make you into one.”

When she was transformed into Rain Pou, for the first time, Kaori felt some form of power and freedom.

The next time her sister tried to come along. Kaori, as Rain Pou, casually kicked her off a flight of stairs.

Her sister broke her legs because of that. For the first time, her sister seemed *scared* of her. She was no longer the one Kaori had to be afraid of.

Her sister may not know it’s Kaori, but the fact that for the first time in forever, Kaori was the one in power, was satisfying.

As her sister was taken to a hospital. Kaori began to rebuild her life. She found a part-time job, and she used whatever money her sister had left to support herself.

Most of her time would be spent as Rain Pou, as Magical Girls need no sustenance. But for school, work, and other things, she would become Kaori.

She finally was able to buy her own clothes, redesign her house, play some awesome games, and generally live life as she *should* have. Not under some abusive tyrant.

She worked hard enough that she entered into a prestigious high school, Namiyama High School.

Throughout these years, Toko had been loyal to Kaori, sticking by her as her mascot.

After a few years of partnering with Toko, Kaori finally asked the question.

“Toko”

“What?”

“Why’d you pick me?”

“Well… you had potential. You’d need a strong heart, a strong mind, and a general willingness to *do* something to become a Magical Girl.”

“That’s not what I mean. I mean… Anyone could have that. Why *me*?”

“Oh. Well… Cause you’re not a goody two-shoes pure hearted maiden.”

“Huh?”

“You’re life sucks, you play dirty cause playing clean will get you hurt, you’re sneaky, you deceive people all the time, and if you see an opportunity, you’d take it in an instant.”

“Wow… You’re not even gonna *try* and disguise it with a compliment.”

“Rain Pou, that *is* my compliment. I don’t *want* some idealistic naïve glass-half-full girl as the Magical Girl I’m partnered with. I need someone like *you*.”

“Huh… What about the Land of Magic?”

“I sent my reports. I told them I found someone. It was a successful scouting mission, and the result was *you*. They’re satisfied. I’m satisfied. What’s there left to say?”

Rain Pou chuckled and shook her head,

“Wow… Never thought of it that way.”

“Yeah, well… We’re stuck with each other for now. I know I made the right choice, so I’m stickin’ with it.”

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 9 Minutes)**

Wedin had ran as fast as she could. She ran towards the only direction she could think of. Away.

Away from that place.

Wedin's head was foggy, but it was now clearing up. Much much clearer than before.

She had apparently been entranced by Pukin.

She'd felt genuine happiness.

When she got scratched, her heart beat with excitement.

Now she was disgusted. She let her friends die in front of her, and she was an accomplice to everything they did afterwards.

She remembers everything. Everything she did. However, now she had completely forgotten how to speak English. It seems like the things you learn during your brainwash go away when you return to normal.

But there are things that Wedin learned that weren't dependent on the brainwashing.

For example, Wedin had learned about Pythie Frederica's team.

They had been looking for an assassin.

The assassin is hiding amongst the Namiyama High School students.

There is an Investigation Team from some place called the Land of Magic.

They no longer have Funny Trick as hostages.

Funny Trick stole Frederica's crystal ball.

Captain Grace is dead.

Captain Grace is dead…

Wedin curled her fists. She couldn't protect her team. She was supposed to be their leader, but she couldn't protect them.

Everyone voted for her too. It was either her or Grace, and now Grace was dead. Wedin wasn't very good at fighting in the first place, but she was a class representative, so leadership should be in her blood.

So why is it so hard for her.

She continued running through the streets, when she saw a figure in the distance, running as well.

Wait, that was…

…Funny Trick!

"Funny Trick! Funny Trick, wait!"

Funny Trick looked back, she nearly tripped as she saw Wedin. She must've thought Wedin was there to bring her back to Team Pythie.

Funny Trick's face looked like she was horrified out of her mind. She was sweating and her face was red with bruises from what happened at Pythie's base.

Wedin remembered the incident. She remembered dozing happily at the presence of Pukin, and watching her friend be tortured.

"Funny Trick, please wait. I can explain…"

Funny Trick tried to run away.

"Funny Trick, I order you to stop!"

Trembling, Funny Trick instantly stopped in her tracks. Her magic still worked. She still had the promise of leadership.

The whole team voted for her to be the leader after all, it was a contract by any other word. Democratically chosen.

Wedin approached Funny Trick. "Please, calm down."

Funny Trick's body was trembling, though she was standing still.

"N-No… Don't take me back, please…"

"Calm down, Funny Trick. Take a deep breath," ordered Wedin.

Funny Trick took a deep breath, but she didn't exhale. She continued taking the breath until her face was red.

"No, that's not what I meant, just… Exhale. Relax, okay. Relax…"

Funny Trick exhaled, her face was still red and sweaty from fear.

"Earlier today… I wasn't myself. I was under some form of mind control. I didn't mean anything I did."

Funny Trick only looked at Wedin with fearful eyes.

"I… Oh god, I… Miss Himeno…" said Wedin, realizing the full extent of what her control implied.

"Funny Trick, listen to me. We'll get out of this, okay. I can't… I can't promise you anything. I'm sorry that Grace is dead, I'm sorry that… everything here was caused by me, but I *will* get you out of this."

Funny Trick looked like she was about to break down into tears. Her mouth was trembling.

"Funny Trick, you can move."

Funny Trick dropped to her knees. She didn't make much sound, but her whimpering was enough for Wedin to know.

She was crying.

Wedin crouched down towards her, offered her a hug. Funny Trick didn't reject. She'd been through a lot. She'd been through things that Wedin hadn't been through before.

Slowly, Funny Trick hugged her too. But Wedin felt that Funny Trick's arms were still trembling.

Wedin was not a combat capable Magical Girl. Many people informed this. Their strongest Magical Girl in their group is gone.

But strength doesn't win everything. Wedin was a smart person. She needed to think about some other way to win.

You don't have to beat your opponent to win, because the objective isn't to defeat them. The objective in this case is to survive.

"We can't fight, Funny Trick."

"…What?"

"We're clearly not a match for these girls. They're veterans. What's important is our safety. We need to find a way out of this barrier."

"How?"

"I've got a plan."

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 10 Hours, 7 Minutes)**

3 Rainbows from the front.

2 Rainbows from the top.

4 From the back.

Despite this pincer attack, Ripple managed to anticipate and dodge them all at once. She was just too damn fast.

"S-Stop fighting!" screamed Postarie in the background.

The problem with the rainbows is that they lag. They have to be created somewhere where Rain Pou can see them, and then they have to elongate towards their target.

Ripple has an extremely high reaction time. Her movements were fast even for a Magical Girl. This is probably due to the fact that she's a ninja. Every Magical Girl has *some* kind of advantage that others don't have.

And then began Ripple's counter-attack.

"Please… just *stop*!" yelled Postarie.

Shuriken and Kunai thrown towards Rain Pou. She can't possibly kick them all at once. But these ones were different.

When Rain Pou was running from Ripple back then, she noticed them, and they were gliding through the air, slightly slow.

These ones were fast.

Just like how Rain Pou was holding back before, so was Ripple. This time, Ripple wanted to hurt her. This means that the only way to block it is…

Rain Pou erected rainbow walls from the ground, attempting to literally wall off the Shuriken and Kunai. It may work, but she doesn't have line of sight with Ripple.

Rain Pou can't produce rainbows where she doesn't have line of sight. Ripple is trying to take advantage of this.

So Rain Pou should take advantage of Ripple's weakness too…

…Her left side. A blind spot. Her left arm was gone, and she was also blind in the left eye. Rain Pou decided to act on this.

She produced a rainbow, headed straight for Ripple's right side. Predictably, Ripple pre-emptively dodged it. However, Rain Pou then arced it towards her left, catching Ripple by surprise.

Immediately, Ripple took out her Katana, twirled her body, and braced herself so that the rainbow edge clashed with her Katana, protecting herself from getting sliced by the rainbow.

A moment of distraction.

Rain Pou erected 3 rainbows boxing Ripple in. One in Ripple's left, one in her right, and one behind her. No escape, as it was too tall to jump over.

She couldn't place a rainbow in front of Ripple, as that would prevent line of sight.

Instead, she produced a rainbow that went straight for Ripple's torso. Three rainbows, low, mid, high. Ripple can't jump out of this one. There was no way out of the box.

"Kaori, *listen to me*!" screamed Postarie again.

But Ripple wasn't running. Instead, she threw a consecutive series of Shuriken and Kunai… far above Rain Pou?

Wait… Why was she overthrowing it…

"Behind you!" said Toko from Rain Pou's chest pocket.

Shit!

Rain Pou turned around, dissolving any rainbows headed towards Ripple, and produced a huge rainbow wall blocking the incoming Shuriken and Kunai.

She heard more.

Ripple was jumping from lamp post to lamp post, throwing Shuriken and Kunai in every direction. It was hard to actively block them, so Kaori began creating walls in a ring-like fashion.

But with so many things flying around all around her, she can't possibly cover all her sides. Several Shuriken sliced her, stuck to her legs and arms. Some were blocked with the rainbows.

The Shuriken and Kunai that were blocked littered the streets.

"D-Don't kill Kaori either, *please*!" again screamed out Postarie, in the streets taking cover from the battle.

At first, Rain Pou found it hard to keep up with the Shuriken, but once she learned the angles, she understood where each Shuriken would go. They always targeted her, so it was easy to block the most straightforward path to her. After all, the Shuriken don't actually have a mind of their own.

A barrage of Shuriken, blocked.

Surprise attack with a Kunai, blocked.

Shuriken from above, blocked.

The angles were becoming easier to predict. Ripple had begun to run out of options.

Another wave of Shurikens, overshot and thrown from behind. Rain Pou produced a wall in their path. It should stop them… or… it *should*, but…

The Shuriken actually bobbed and weaved *around* the wall? It was headed straight towards Rain Pou. Unexpected, Rain Pou dodged, but was grazed by one of them.

“Nngh!”

How did that one do that?

Then Rain Pou realized, the Shuriken didn’t come towards her. It merely passed through her.

The Shuriken went towards Ripple’s hand, as she caught it, and threw it again.

Jumping from a light post to the rooftop, another Shuriken, catching the one she previously threw.

Jumping towards a different lamp post, a Kunai thrown, Rain Pou was hit, a Shuriken caught.

Jumping towards another lamppost, repeat.

She was jumping in circles towards Rain Pou, and she was throwing projectiles that weren’t aimed to Rain Pou…

…They were aimed towards Ripple’s hand.

They were weaving and bobbing because Ripple was also moving, making their angles impossible to predict. Ripple moving in a circle only made the Shurikens pass towards Rain Pou.

A Shuriken stabbed her leg, a kunai stabbed her elbow, Ripple was too fast. Can’t block her. Can’t block all these Shurikens.

“STOP IT!!!” She heard Postarie screaming, She saw Postarie, eyes wide, afraid, and on her hands…

…Were all the Shuriken and Kunai dropped from the ground.

“*Stop Stop Stop it STOP IT!!!!*”

Postarie screamed as all the Shuriken and Kunai in her hands began to grow wings, and began flying.

They flew, at express speed. All of them. All the Shuriken that Postarie had collected in their fight. Postarie, who both Ripple and Rain Pou ignored, had been so scared that she had done this.

Ripple’s eyes widened. A wave of Shuriken and Kunai flew in the air and moved in an arc towards her.

Ripple began throwing as many of her own projectiles, attempting to throw fast enough to block the incoming wave.

They began to hit each other, and as they hit, the wings went away… But Rain Pou wouldn’t allow that.

Rain Pou produced a rainbow bridge above Ripple, blocking her line of sight, and blocking the projectiles Ripple threw.

Then, at the last moment, Rain Pou removed the rainbow bridge.

Ripple braced herself. She tried to dodge as best as she could, using her right arm to protect her face.

A kunai stabbed her leg, a shuriken grazed her body, another stabbed her in the stomach, more of them stabbed her in the right forearm, another stabbed her in the chest.

It kept coming and coming, non-stop, as Ripple tried to run as fast as possible. Some missed, but Ripple was bleeding.

When the wave of Shurikens and Kunai stopped, Ripple staggered backwards.

“Gk... Ngh… Ack!?”

Ripple couldn’t speak, and blood began dripping from her wounds. She found it hard to move, and as she staggered and staggered backwards, she fell into the hole in the street.

A light signified that Ripple had detransformed, and all the Shuriken and Kunai in the ground disappeared along with it.

It was over…

Rain Pou sighed a deep breath of relief, and behind her, Postarie covered her mouth, tears forming in her eyes.

☆ **7753 (Remaining Time: 9 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

Hana's body was cold. Checking with her goggles, 7753 had confirmed that Hana had died. She transformed back into a human.

She looked like she was in her late teens. Possibly 17-ish, or maybe early 20's.

Hana was peaceful, smiling, but gone.

Meanwhile Mana just closed her eyes.

7753's goggles received a message from her mentor.

Mana's not taking it well, is she?

7753 shook her head.

Losing someone that close to you is… devastating. If possible, give her time. Still, try to comfort her. The Foreign Affairs Division just sent out an announcement. Will text later.

7753, on a whim, decided to use her goggles towards Hana again, to see any kind of relationship she had with Hana.

That's when she saw the status.

Family: Mana (Sister – Adoptive)

7753 widened her eyes. She looked towards the side, glancing at Mana as she stood up. Mana didn't seem mad, she didn't seem sad, she just seemed… somber.

"I'm taking full responsibility for this," said Mana.

“Mana, it’s not-”

“I know what you’re going to say. It’s okay. I’m dealing with it in my own way. I was the one who volunteered for the job, Hana wanted to protect me. She knew the risks, I knew the risks. I’m a leader, I take responsibility.”

7753 didn’t know what to say. Mana seemed very distant at the moment. As if she’s there, but not there.

Thinking of something to break the ice, 7753 blurted it out,

“When… When we stopped by the convenience store, Hana told me.”

“Told you what?”

“That you two were sisters… I’m sorry for your loss.”

It was a lie. Hana never told her this.

Mana sighed, “Well, we’re not blood siblings. My father was the head of the Examination Division, and Hana was a young Magical Girl. He took her into the family, and I got close, that’s all there is to it.”

“But still, it’s family.”

“I know, that’s why I’m taking responsibility. I’ve been too… reckless and overprotective that I lost sight of the entire mission. Damn it.”

“If you need anyone…”

“…Look, I’m trying my best to shut myself off of any emotional breakdowns right now. It’s what got Hana killed in the first place, okay, 7753? I appreciate your concern, but we’ll handle this when… *if*… we all get out of here.”

“It’s okay to mourn.”

“But it’s not okay to be emotional in a life-or-death mission. I’m learning it the hard way.”
7753, bad news.

Her goggles had begun to transmit text again. It’s her mentor.

Foreign Affairs just issued an ultimatum. Mao Pam is dead.

Confirmed. Some Mages had equipped her with a life sign detector before she went in the mission. She's gone. They also know about the break-in to the barrier. Given that their most strongest Magical Girl is gone, they're doing something lethal. It's not good.

They're in charge of the barrier, so they're going to lethalize it. Since there were around 5 Magical Girls that are unaccounted for. The assassin and Pythie's group, that's 5 too many. They're making the barrier a dead zone.

Because their most powerful Magical Girl fell, and the fact that there's 5 criminals. They may have lost faith. They're going to pull the plug.

If the barrier runs out, it will send a shockwave that will kill anyone with magic.

7753, I'm going to be off contact for a while. I shouldn't really be talking to you, and they're investigating my manor. I trust you can handle yourself. Find the students, get the assassin.

With that, her mentor stopped.

7753 wasn't too good with field duty, as this is her first outing, but she had to prepare herself. For once, she was truly on her own without any help.

The fact that she'll be killed at the end of the day wasn't helping her either.

"I-I think we should regroup with the students and the others, like Ripple."

"Ripple hasn't come back in a while, I'm assuming she's either dead or captured."

"Mana!"

"I'm not trying to imply she *is* dead or captured, but if we rush in without knowing, we'll just end up like this. Our Magical Phones don't work, so we have to stick together. Kuru-Kuru Hime!"

"Y-Yes?" Said Hime, who has been standing behind them nervously this whole time.

"You're a teacher, they're your students. Any idea where we could find them?"

"I may have their phone contacts. Phones still work, after all. I've got a list somewhere at home, my father keeps it safe."

“Then let’s go. You can keep up, right? Cause I sure can’t” asked Mana, as she gestured for a piggyback on 7753.

“Lead the way,” said 7753.

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 9 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

When Hime opened the door to her house, she was not prepared for what she would see.

Firstly, her gate had been disintegrated. That alone was enough to make her run towards the house. Her fears were then confirmed.

She saw her father dead in the living room, a pool of blood on his neck.

Hime couldn’t move. She couldn’t think. She just remembered. She wished this day never happened.

Her father had never been very sociable. It was her mother that was sociable. Her mother would have guests at home when Hime was a child.

In fact, her father had mostly been a quiet man, a bit lazy, but always nice and talkative whenever someone approached him for a subject.

When her mother fell ill, her father had changed in more ways than one.

When her mother died, her father tried to protect Hime and raise her as a single parent. It was a hard thing to do, but he managed it.

He lost the spark in his eye. He protected Hime, but he didn’t have much to live for but his daughter.

He was proud that Hime became a teacher at a school, but because he couldn’t really motivate himself to work, Hime allowed him to stay over at her house. After all, it’s her father. He was family.

He didn’t do much at home, he read the news, he was elderly, and Hime was okay with that. He still worried for her, and still loved her.

Now he was dead.

7753 approached Hime, “I’m… I’m very sorry.”

“I… It’s okay. It explains how… It explains how Frederica got my hair. I… I just, I’ll get over this. I just have to protect… the kids. They’re *my* kids. I have to find them.”

Staring one last time, Hime closed her father’s eyes, and she went towards her room upstairs.

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 9 Hours, 35 Minutes)**

Pythie had escaped the fight sneakishly. She felt that there was no way she could’ve gotten out of it alive otherwise.

With her powers gone, her apprentice gone, Pukin gone, she was left with nothing but her mind.

She had to formulate a plan. Trapped in a barrier-filled city, disabled with no crystal ball.

She had to find Funny Trick. No hostage either, so she had to find a way to gain information and leverage.

She was also angered at Tot Pop’s death. She was a good apprentice, and she was killed just like that. She disliked Rain Pou, but admired her determination.

But this is no time for that.

Pythie jumped towards the roof of their apartment, intending to enter through the veranda. If it was closed or locked, she would break in.

But it was…

…Open?

“Come in, I’ve been expecting you, Frederica.”

Pythie heard a voice from inside when she dropped down to the veranda of the apartment. She recognized the voice.

Pukin.

It wasn't a request, it was a command, framed like a request.

"Shogun Pukin, you're alive…"

"I knew you'd come back here Frederica. Instincts from my days in the Examination Division," said Pukin.

Frederica saw the inside of the apartment. Pitch black. She saw Pukin sitting in the sofa, in an awkward position. Pukin was hurt, Frederica could tell. The lights were off to mask that.

"Your plan failed. Spectacularly," said Pukin.

"That is true, Shogun. I humbly apologize," Pythie replied.

There's no way Pukin would accept that apology. As Pythie bowed, she slowly took a step backwards. She was trying to look for means of escape, keeping her distance.

If Pukin had her rapier, she would need to step fast. Pythie had to be away from striking distance.

Pukin then stood up, a bit limp, but still threatening,

"Sonia's dead. Tot Pop's dead. So… let's have a little… discussion," said Pukin, her mad grin showing in the darkness of the room.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 9 Hours, 3 Minutes)**

Wedin had travelled to the edge of town. This is where the barrier *should* be.

Okay, stick to the plan. An experiment has to be performed. The barrier supposedly disallows exit or entry of magical people, objects, or any other kind.

Wedin grabbed a wooden branch from a nearby tree, and she removed some decorations from her Magical Girl outfit.

She placed the decorations on the stick, hanging it in front of her. She moved slowly, and slowly. Still unsure if the barrier's pain would travel towards the stick, should it activate.

As she moved, her stick bumped into something invisible. The barrier.

Her decorations, considered part of her costume, is magical then. She dare not touch the barrier to find out.

First test, her dress is considered a magical item.

Second test, she removed the decorations from the branches. Then, she slowly pushed the branch to where the barrier was.

It passed through.

Alright, second test, normal ordinary objects can pass through.

Now for the third test.

Funny Trick nodded, and pulled out two cloaks from her outfit. She first placed a used can that she got from the trash on the way here.

She wrapped it in the cloak, and she threw it over the barrier. It was now outside.

Next, she placed her cloak on the decorations in the ground. With both items hidden from view, she performed her magic.

When she removed it…

The can was back in her cloth, and therefore, the decorations were outside the barrier.

“HAHAHA! YES!!! YEAH!!!” yelled out Funny Trick. In her excitement, she hugged Wedin and twirled her around.

Wedin was surprised, but happy that Funny Trick had been able to do this. This means they can teleport people outside the barrier using Funny Trick’s powers.

But Funny Trick… can she transport herself?

“We have to tell the others, we can escape!” said Funny Trick.

“How are we going to tell them? Our Magical Phones don’t work.”

“Postarie! If we can just find someone’s items, Postarie can send a message and we can let them know!”

“But where *is* she?”

“We’ll figure that out later, right now we found a *way out*! We can escape this place and leave the fighting to those other guys!”

“Funny Trick… I… I’m going to say my opinion. It’s not an order, but… I’d like you to leave first. Get help from the outside, I’ll find the others, we can meet back here, and-”

“What? No. No, no, no, I’m staying. I’m helping you find the others.”

“But… you’ve been through so much, and I…”

“It’s not your fault, okay. Look, it’s been rough, I… I don’t know if I can go back to a regular day at school anymore, but, until then I’m sticking with you, okay?”

“But the others, we might run into… those guys, again.”

“We’ll find the others!”

“It’s not like they’ll just pop out of the sky”

“Mei can do that,” said a familiar voice.

They saw Tepsekemei materialize behind them.

“TEPSEKEMEI!” both of them yelled out.

Wedin came out and hugged her friend. “Mei, I’m so glad you’re alive. Where *were* you?”

“Hello… Oh… Mei had been trying to find Wedin. Mei was hurt, tired. Mei found Wedin in a car chase, but… Mei was scared.”

“Scared?”

“Wedin was working for the enemy. Mei was scared… Now Wedin and Funny Trick are together, so Mei came back. Mei doesn’t want to get hurt, so…”

“Oh, Mei, it’s alright! We’ve all been through a lot,” said Wedin, hugging her tighter.

Funny Trick folded her arms and smiled, “Well, we’re three here. We just need to find Rain Pou and Postarie, right?”

Wedin nodded, “Yes. Yes, we… Yes.”

She knew that one of them had to be the Assassin. She hoped it wasn’t, but based on the information she received, she knew.

One of their friends was not who she claimed to be.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 8 Hours, 37 Minutes)**

Rain Pou had escaped the area with Postarie.

She was in a safe place, a quiet place. However, Postarie was just sitting there, slumped down, unsure of what to do, as Rain Pou paced herself in the distance.

Rain Pou had a conversation with Toko as well.

“She’s acting kind of weird,” said Toko.

“She’s *scared*,” replied Rain Pou.

“We’re still going with the plan, right?”

Rain Pou took a deep breath,

“Rain Pou. We’re still going to leverage her if things turn sour, right? Hey?”

“Just… Lemme think, Toko. Lemme talk to her, okay?”

“This has always been the plan. You can’t back down or it’s over for both of us if they catch us.”

“I know. Please, just let me talk to her, okay?”

“Fine, go”

Uncomfortable with the fact that Toko still hid in her chest pocket, meaning that she can't have a private conversation, Rain Pou still went over to Postarie.

The plan had always been this.

Rain Pou lived in B-City. She was going to do something that will get her attention. The Examination Division is going to come after her.

So there was a plan. Toko identified several individuals that would become useful Magical Girls to hide themselves with.

However, they also needed to have the right personality.

Umi Shihabara was someone who loved adventure and fighting, and a bit dimwitted too, so she's definitely going to be there.

If Umi's coming, then she can definitely persuade Kayo Nemura, who was her best friend.

Afterwards, the student council, Mine Musubiya, whom Kaori knew had a bit of a closet fangirl obsession with Magical Girls. Perfect target.

Then, if all else fails, Miss Nozomi Himeno, the teacher, would definitely be easy to manipulate because she wanted to protect her students.

All of these people were chosen, so that if Toko needed to disguise Rain Pou among some newbie Magical Girls, they will definitely fight alongside Toko.

Either gullible, or easily manipulated. Other kids may not be so easy to do. Rain Pou had used her connections with friends to find these people, and narrowed it down to these.

It was easy enough to rig the lottery for the Cleanup Inspection Crew. Toko had enchanted the cards in the first place so that the votes would always be them, and so they'll always be chosen that day.

It was never a stroke of luck, it was all planned.

All of it.

Except for Postarie.

Rain Pou never distanced herself from Postarie. Rain Pou distance herself emotionally from the other girls, so that she won't feel much if they had to die or worse.

Rain Pou trained herself to not care about the other students.

With Postarie, Rain Pou approached her because she was alone and a social outcast.

Rain Pou wasn't searching for a Magical Girl when she approached Tatsuko that day. She was searching for a friend.

She approached her out of actual kindness, as she also had a normal school life.

They did become friends, what they felt was true. So when Toko decided that her closeness was compromising the possibility of a plan, Rain Pou said that she was simply scouting a classmate of hers as a potential Magical Girl. It was either that, or lose their friendship.

And with Tatsuko's only friend being Rain Pou, she couldn't afford to make her friend… friendless again.

Rain Pou had tried. She *tried* to introduce Postarie to as many friends as she could, to get her to open up, but Postarie only trusted Rain Pou. She didn't want Postarie to rely on Rain Pou.

She didn't want Tatsuko to be a part of all this.

She never thought she'd cause her to be dragged in this mess too.

Postarie was never supposed to happen.

Postarie would never have agreed to become a Magical Girl or fight for Toko. She didn't have the personality nor the right reasons to do so.

Rain Pou knew that. She never wanted Postarie to be apart of this.

Tatsuko was her friend.

Rain Pou hoped that when she had to show her true colors, that Postarie would just abandon her. That Postarie would leave. Be safe.

She didn't. Instead, she helped her. Now she's an accomplice.

Rain Pou approached Postarie, and with a sigh, placed her hands on her hips.

"Hey, Ta-Chan."

"…Hey."

"Why did you help me? I was trying to kill that girl."

"Because… you're my friend."

"What?"

"It's… This is what friends are for, right?"

Rain Pou looked down at Postarie. Her teeth gritting with worry. She took a deep breath.

"Yeah. Yeah, it is. Thank you, Ta-Chan. Look, I'll make sure you get out of this just fine, okay."

"…Okay, Kaori."

Rain Pou turned around and closed her eyes.

Shit. I'm so fucking stupid…

What have I done…

Chapter 11
What Are Friends For

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 8 Hours, 20 Minutes)**

"You wish to talk, Shogun?"

"I wish to understand your situation, Frederica."

Pukin was hardly moving. Her face was distorted in shadow. Frederica could see her silhouette, and her flaming orange hair.

“Sonia’s dead, Frederica.”

“I understand that.”

“Tot Pop is also dead, Frederica.”

“And I’m deeply angered at that fact, Shogun.”

This was the truth. Pythie loved Tot Pop as a disciple. She was genuinely angered that she had died. Although, Pythie isn’t the type to let anger make her do reckless things.

Pukin, on the other hand, was different.

Pythie can’t read Pukin’s face. Was she angry at losing Sonia? Was she angry that she was defeated? Was she here to bargain with Pythie?

No, that’s not it.

That time, Pukin ran away. She retreated. It was the only option for survival, but that very option was against Pukin’s every being.

Pukin prides herself on being the strongest, so a retreat was out of the question. However, Pukin isn’t stupid, and so she knows when it truly is dangerous to stay in the battlefield.

When the assassin showed, Pukin was far too damaged to fight, so she retreated.

Right now, Pukin’s voice was calm, but her pose in the couch was that of a rabid dog, ready to strike at any time.

“Are you angered, Frederica? Are you really?”

“Of course I am. Tot Pop was my best disciple.”

“So why didn’t you save her?”

“Against Pam?”

“You didn’t use your crystal ball, Frederica.”

Oh no.

She hadn’t told Pukin that it was stolen.

“How would that have helped, Shogun?”

“*Plenty*! You could’ve reached her in the sky, we could’ve all retreated, we could’ve pulled Sonia out of the pit where she *died*. The question is… why. Did you not. Use it?”

Pukin will never forgive Pythie, regardless of what answer she chose to go with.
If she told her that it was stolen, Pukin would end her life for being incompetent and outsmarted.

If she told her that she didn’t bother using it, then Pukin would accuse her of sabotage.

Either way, Pukin would kill her.

She’s not even trying to give Pythie a chance to explain herself. Pukin won’t admit her mistakes and is trying to find a scapegoat. Simple as that.

Meaning Pythie has to escape. The veranda was her only chance.

“Answer me, Frederica!” growled Pukin as she slowly stood up.

The shadows no longer covered her face and shaded her in darkness. What Pythie saw was a face mangled with blood and scars.

Pukin’s nose was broken, her head was bleeding, every bit of her body was struggling to stand up.

But she stood up out of anger.

Normally, Pukin would outpace Pythie, and she still could. However, Pythie saw her chance when Pukin struggled to move.

Immediately, Pythie jumped off the veranda, falling down towards the streets below.

Pukin’s reaction time was slower than usual, but whatever happened behind her, Pythie didn’t care.

As she fell, her Magical Girl body allowed her to survive the impact with the ground. She ran as fast as she could, knowing that Pukin could still give chase.

Luckily, she didn't.

However, Pythie was on her own now. No Tot Pop. No followers. No support.

☆ **Tepsekemei (Remaining Time: 7 Hours, 15 Minutes)**

Who is friend, and who is foe?

Tepsekemei really doesn't know anymore.

After her journeys in the sky, she's seen many things that made her question her allies and enemies.

When she became human, at first, it was simple.

Wedin, Funny Trick, Captain Grace, Kuru-Kuru Hime, Postarie, Rain Pou, Toko.

They were allies. They were friends. Everyone else that fought them were enemies. It was a simple thing to remember.

But now, it feels as if everyone is switching sides, and it's hard to tell friend or foe.

Maybe it's because Tepsekemei was not human, but Tepsekemei couldn't understand or process many of these things.

"Funny Trick. Mei saw you with the enemy. Why were you with the enemy?"

Funny Trick only looked at Tepsekemei, and her face seemed to display some emotion of concern. Maybe sadness? Tepsekemei couldn't tell.

"Wedin? You were also with the enemy?"

"It's… complicated, Mei."

"Mei wants to understand."

“It doesn’t matter anymore. What matters is that we’re friends now, okay? We’re still your friends,” reassured Wedin.

“What about others?”

“Pukin, Sonia Bean, Pythie Frederica, and Tot Pop. Those are our enemies,” said Wedin.

“Pukin… Sonia… Who?” asked Mei.

“They’re the ones that attacked Grace.”

“Oh… And the rabbit? The ninja?”

“Who knows. They didn’t seem to be friendly with Pythie’s group. It’s possible that we can cooperate… Yeah, we should definitely cooperate,” concluded Wedin.

“Toko?”

“Pythie’s looking for an assassin among our group. She said that Toko was her partner, so we can’t trust Toko.”

“You believe what they said?” asked Mei.

“There was no reason for them to lie. Funny Trick and I were not in a position to fight back.”

Wedin and Funny Trick’s expressions and faces were different from usual. They look like a mixture of sadness and fear.

“What’s wrong? Why are you two so quiet? Is Mei being bad?” asked Tepsekemei.

“No, Mei. You’re fine, it’s just… People cope differently when they’re stressed. We’ve just had a horrible time,” said Wedin, reassuring Tepsekemei with her warm smile.

“Okay… So, who is the assassin?”

“We don’t know, but we know it’s between Postarie, Rain Pou, and Kuru-Kuru Hime.”

“So, are they enemies?”

“Be careful around them. We don’t know. Mei, I’m sorry to ask you to do something like this, but your powerset is the only one that’s proper for this kind of job,” said Wedin.

“What is it?”

“Reconnaissance.”

“Reconi…since?”

“Searching. We need you to fly and search for our friends, and possibly enemies.”

“Oh. Mei can do that.”

“Great, if you find someone, tell us where they are, okay? Do you remember what everyone looks like?”

“…Yes.”

“What’s Postarie’s power?” asked Wedin.

“To manipulate ribbons.”

Wedin and Funny Trick looked at each other, and took a long deep breath.

“…Don’t forget this, okay? If you see a Magical Girl. Remember their face. Remember where they are. Remember their outfit. You’ll go back to the mountains. You’ll report to me. You’ll tell me everything you saw. Is that a promise?”

Tepsekemei nodded, “Yes. Mei promises.”

“Good. That should ensure you won’t forget… I hope. Alright, Mei. Good luck out there, and stay safe, okay?”

Tepsekemei nodded again, and she thinned her body in order to become one with the wind.

Her constant experiences of this have made her more proficient when using her powers. She’s a lot more flexible in doing so.

She followed the wind across the city landscape. So many people were driving around in their cars and whatnot.

Not a Magical Girl.

Not a Magical Girl.

Not the one Tepsekemei's looking for.

Why is there nobody here? Tepsekemei couldn't find anything. Her eyes were getting very tired from looking around.

Instinctively, Tepsekemei went towards Namiyama High's building. It was home for her, and she wanted to take a small break from trying to find people.

She descended on the rooftop, and looked at the clouds. Her eyes felt tired from looking at so many people.

The clouds were boring too. They were slow, and didn't do much.

But there was something moving in the clouds. A small object, wth wings.

This was interesting. It looked like the object was headed towards Tepsekemei. What is it? Why is it going to her?

The object then descended into her palm.

A lamp. An oil lamp to be specific. Tepsekemei remembered that Grace gave this to her when they were in the apartment, but she threw it away because she didn't understand what it meant.

So why was it here?

That's when two Magical Girls climbed up to the roof. Two Magical Girls. This was important. Tepsekemei immediately remembered evey detail of their facial features.

But she couldn't remember their names…

There was one that looked like a rainbow, so it has to be Rain Pou, right? Who's the other one… Kuru-Kuru… Hime? That was her name, right?

"Mei, you're back at school. Do you know where the others are?" asked the rainbow girl.

Tepsekemei stood still, trying her best to remember the other girl's name. What was it? Such short memory span…

A small fairy popped out of the rainbow girl's chest pocket.

Tepsekemei remembers her! She's hard to forget. Toko! It was Toko. But wait, Wedin said that…

"Toko is the enemy."

Tepsekemei blurted out what she said. She didn't think about it, she just stated a fact as it was through her mouth.

Both the Magical Girls' eyes widened.

Without warning, a rainbow came straight towards Tepsekemei. She acted fast enough. As the rainbow sliced her body, she had already turned thin as wind.

Tepsekemei was unfazed, and she began to spread her body out more and more, becoming one with the wind as she does.

As she became one with the wind, she forcefully blew gusts of wind towards the two Magical Girls. The flashier aggressive one was pushed back, and the timid looking one could barely hold her balance.

The flashy one then grabbed the hand of her friend as they both got blown away, with her other hand, she grabbed an iron fence to hold on as Mei continued unleashing a torrent of wind onto them.

But she had to go back. She had to report back to Wedin, so Tepsekemei left them, and flew high towards the sky.

☆ **Postarie (Remaining Time: 6 Hours, 35 Minutes)**

For the past few minutes, Rain Pou and Toko were arguing on the roof.

Postarie sat down, still in disbelief after what just transpired from before. She still couldn't believe that she had helped Rain Pou.

“This can all be traced back to you, Toko!”

“What? How is any of this *my* fault?”

“Because you went rogue and started a manhunt?”

“Uhh… News flash, *you* too!”

“Yeah but I was sneakier about it. Everyone practically knows you’re bad news.”

The two were arguing back and forth, but it didn’t seem like they hated each other. The way they argued actually seemed as if they were close friends.

Postarie wondered if Rain Pou considered her a close friend… Or even just a friend.

Friends talk and laugh with each other. They sometimes fight, but are never truly mad at each other. They support each other as well.

She was used to a life without friends, but Kaori changed that.

Lunch together, going home together, playing together. Postarie liked that. She liked that someone would give her a chance.

She didn’t want to lose that kind of feeling, to go back to being alone. She had a hard time interacting with people as it is.

She didn’t want Rain Pou to die, so she helped her friend.

She didn’t want Rain Pou to die, so she acted.

She didn’t want Rain Pou to die, so she killed the ninja.

She killed the ninja…

…She killed someone to protect a friend.

The thought still lingered in Postarie’s mind. The weight of her actions is bearing down on her. She couldn’t believe that she was capable of something like that.

Although it was the heat of the moment, it was something she did to protect her friend.

Now, her friend is using her as a hostage, and she probably will just accept it. Alone, outside, people will see her as guilty. She's chosen her path.

There's just no turning back anymore.

Toko and Rain Pou are the bad guys. They're clearly bad news. What they're doing is apparently illegal, even for Magical Girls.

So why can't Postarie bear to leave?

Postarie chuckled and laughed at herself. She laughed at this crazy situation she's in. She laughed at how she chose to react when thrown into something like this.

It used to be so simple. Be loyal to your friends, but now her world was being turned upside-down.

And Postarie laughed at the ridiculousness of it.

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 6 Hours, 17 Minutes)

Mana took out a glass bottle from her 4-Dimensional Bag. The bottle was filled with a variety of pills.

Healing Medicine.

She took one, placed it in her mouth, crunched on it, and swallowed.

Mana yawned. Her eyes were getting tired. Despite her strength, Mana was still human, and staying up all night long was taking a toll on her.

"You doing okay?" asked 7753.

"Don't worry, I'm still focused. More importantly, we need a plan now that we know what we're going to deal with."

"How are we gonna get out of this one?"

"Two ways. Capture the Assassin, or eliminate all threats. Both seem highly difficult to do in… 6 hours."

“So what’s the plan?”

“Hana told you about our relationship?”

“Huh?”

“That we’re sisters. You said she told you?”

She didn’t.

Use it.

Text appeared on 7753’s goggles. Her mentor.

Mana trusts you. Use it. There’s no better chance than this.

7753 gulped.

“Yeah… Yeah, she told me.”

“Hana never tells that to anyone unless she completely trusts them. Since she trusts you for some reason, I’ll put my faith in her and trust you too.”

7753 had a sinking feeling in her heart. This seems to feel wrong, using Mana by lying to her. Her mentor seems perfectly fine with it.

This might still give them a chance to survive, and Mana trusting 7753 *was* a good thing, but she wished there was a different way other than this.

“Your goggles will be very important. They can tell you info about Magical Girls right?”

“Yeah?”

“Use them on everyone. Doesn’t matter. Use them on me too. We need to know if one of our own was brainwashed or not.”

“Okay.”

“And 7753, one more thing.”

“What is it?”

“If you see me getting brainwashed. Kill me.”

“Huh? That’s a little overreacting don’t you think?”

“I’m a high-ranking official of the Land of Magic, I *cannot* be compromised. I’m a human. You see me getting brainwashed, you kill me. That’s an order.”

7753’s eyes were in disbelief. She couldn’t go through with it, despite how easy it would be to just kick Mana across the room to kill her.

She couldn’t bring herself to kill Mana.

7753 had thought that Mana would be emotionally wounded after Hana’s loss. What happened instead was that Mana seems to be shutting off any emotions at all.

She’s calmer, yes, but devoid of any kind of emotion.

Kuru-Kuru Hime approached the two. “Um… Excuse me. I’ve got a call.”

“A call? Magical Phone? Is it working?” asked Mana.

“No, it’s not my Magical Phone, it’s my cellphone.”

Hime handed over her smartphone to Mana. The number on it was listed as ‘*Unknown*’. Mana thought for a moment, and handed the phone over to 7753, answering it while pressing loudspeaker.

“Ah, hello. Is this Kuru-Kuru Hime?” asked a voice from the other end. It was a female voice, slightly calm and sophisticated.

“No. My name is 7753.”

“7753? From the Human Resources Division? It’s nice to be talking with you!”

This person knows 7753 *and* knows Kuru-Kuru Hime. Who is this?

“Yeah… who is this?”

“I don’t believe we’ve properly introduced ourselves. My name is Pythie Frederica.”

Mana widened her eyes and took the phone away from 7753, removing loudspeaker and using it herself.

“This is Mana.”

“Hello? To whom am I speaking now?”

“Investigation Team Leader, Mana.”

“Ahh… Mana. I’ve heard many things about you. How is Hana?”

7753 thought that Mana would shout. She thought that Mana would scream out loud, or maybe throw the phone away.

Instead…

“Hana’s dead. Killed by Pukin. No thanks to you.”

“It’s a shame. Hana was a treasure, and I know how close she must be with you.”

“Get to the point.”

“Of course! I didn’t call to talk about that. Our losses have been severe too. Tot Pop has died, and Pukin’s right hand, Sonia Bean, was also killed.”

So they’re down to two prisoners.

“Seems like you guys had a rough night. What does this have to do with calling us?” said Mana.

“Ah, yes. About that. Your losses are large as well. I’ve just returned to the scene of the battle. You should know about this, since it was your car that led to our crash.”

“Go on…”

“Well. Mao Pam has perished, unfortunately. Killed by the Assassin you’re looking for, no less. I’ve also personally checked it myself. Ripple is dead.”

Hearing those words, 7753's heart sank.

Ripple?

Dead…?

She failed to protect her, despite knowing that Ripple was stronger, it was still 7753's job to protect her.

7753 closed her eyes, a mixture of sadness and anger welled up inside of her.

"The way I see it, you're down two, and I'm down two."

"What about Pukin?" asked Mana.

"We've gone our separate ways. Which is why I'm calling you in the first place. I suggest an alliance."

An alliance?

"What? An alliance? What makes you think I'll work together with you?" asked Mana.

"Because I have information you don't. I know the Assassin, I know Pukin, and I know a way out of the barrier before it implodes and kills us. What do you say?"

"What's in it for you, Frederica? Don't you have a way out already?"

"Ah, about that… It's an embarrassing story, but my crystal ball was stolen. Funny Trick. You know her? I find that ball, we get out."

"You can't expect me to trust you, Frederica."

"We were both thrown into this place to find an Assassin. We're simply doing our jobs. Once we escape, I'll even let you arrest me, so long as I get a fair trial."

"You realize you're directly involved in the deaths of two Land of Magic officials, one of which being Mao Pam, right?"

"I'll take my chances. I'll be waiting for your response, Mana. Clock is ticking for us both."

Mana closed the phone. Taking a deep breath and rubbing her forehead.

7753 asked, “Are we gonna do it?”

“No. We’re not.”

The phone rang again. The number was *Unknown* as well.

Mana carefully answered it.

“Hello?”

“Is this Kuru-Kuru Hime!? It’s Wedin! We uh… got this number from a friend of a friend. Is she okay? Is everyone else okay?”

The other two widened their eyes.

“Hello? Can you hear me?” asked Wedin.

Mana nodded to her two partners, “This is Mana from the Land of Magic. Yes, we hear you.”

☆ **Pukin (Remaining Time: 5 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

Pukin’s entire body was in pain.

She tried to walk, but a few steps made her lose balance. Her head was spinning, she couldn’t see straight, and every bone in her body was screaming for her to stop.

This was not what she was like.

Pukin was angered.

Sonia Bean is dead, and she couldn’t even avenge that. She was humiliated and defeated, and she couldn’t even avenge that.

Mao Pam…

How dare she?

Killing Sonia, nearly killing Pukin herself. Pukin wanted poetic justice. She wanted to fight her and kill her herself.

But then someone else killed Mao Pam before she did.

She was angry at that too. She knew the world didn't work like a poem, where the tarnished hero would slay the villain. It didn't change the fact that she was angry.

She walked over to the fridge, picking up any food that was cooked in Pythie's apartment.

Food helps the Magical Girl body heal faster, despite not needing it for survival. Right now, Pukin needs to heal… fast.

So long as the damage is not permanent, it should be possible to heal back.

She ate, and drank, and replenished her body. She was already feeling it starting to get better than before.

She went to the bathroom, looked at the mirror.

Her face was broken. She hadn't realized it until now, but it was scratched, bruised, bleeding. Her nose was broken, and everything looked awful.

Mao Pam's one headbutt did this…

Pukin manually unbroke her nose,

Crack

"NGH…"

The pain made her madder. She turned on the sink. Grabbing water, washing her face of the blood. Rinsing her mouth, spitting out any remaining blood she has on her.

She washed her hair with the water, and her face as well, before looking back at the mirror.

This was the Shogun that she truly was. A ruthless, beautiful, powerful Shogun.

She needed to choose her next target.

Frederica betrayed her, but is otherwise low priority. The Investigation Team will be busy searching for her.

Speaking of the Investigation Team… They would be good targets, but they'll probably come for Pukin herself.

Wedin ran away from her, but Pukin has no idea where she went.

That leaves…

The rainbow girl. The Assassin and her little Fairy.

Yes, that would be nice. Fairies are amazing. Pukin loved Fairies. Fairies are so much fun to torture.

Humans nearly always die so easily, but a Fairy… You can strap them in, peel off every bits of their skin, flay them alive, hear them scream.

It was quite fun.

Besides, the rainbow girl killed Pam. Someone *she* was supposed to kill. Time to pay her back for her troubles.

Pukin took out her rapier. How to get the rainbow assassin? She obviously wouldn't let Pukin near her, so there had to be another way.

Someone who she would allow to get in close.

…The Fairy.

With an insane grin, Pukin sheathed her rapier and walked outside.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 5 Hours, 15 Minutes)**

Rain Pou and Postarie returned to Grace's apartment. It's possible that there are some items that they could use to find their classmates.

Or maybe even their classmates themselves.

Both of them looked around for clues. It surprised Rain Pou how cooperative Postarie had been with her, given the circumstances.

It's not as if she'd complain.

While searching the rooms, Rain Pou found a cellphone, with a text message in it. Toko popped out of her pocket,

"Who's is that?"

"Probably Umi's."

She checked the texts.

Mom: Are you okay, Umi?

Dad: Please call us ASAP.

Rain Pou scrolled through all of them, trying to find hints of how to find her classmates. She could call Funny Trick, but that probably wouldn't convince her at all.

Then, Rain Pou's own cellphone rang.

A text message. Sender's name is '*Unknown*'. Spam?

Tried to contact you. Can't get in touch for some reason, nyan.

No, just her employer.

Chaos here in the Land of Magic. We heard Mao Pam died. Foreign Affairs isn't taking that lightly, nyan.

Anyways, I've got a new job for you. Pukin. Swordsman. Orange hair. She's been stirring up trouble, and it'd be bad for us to actually let her live, so we want you to kill her, nyan.

Of course, we'll throw in the bonus as well, nyan.

"Bonus!?" yelled out Toko.

"You just care about the bonus, don't you?"

“Ehehe”

“Don’t ‘ehehe’ me! I’m the one who’s gonna have to do all the fighting. You realize this, right?”

Plans have changed it seems. Rain Pou was planning on hiding out until the barrier drops. Now she was being hired to kill Pukin.

Postarie looked from the corner of the room, with a worried expression.

“Don’t worry, Ta-Chan. Whatever happens, I’ll protect you, okay?”

Postarie nodded.

Yes, Rain Pou will protect her. She has to protect her.

Besides, she’s still good for a hostage as well, right…?

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 4 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

Tepsekemei has returned.

Along with her, are two other Magical Girls, and Kuru-Kuru Hime.

Seeing her students again, Hime reached out to them and hugged them all. Wedin embraced her teacher happily. For once, she felt a bit safe.

“My name is Mana. This is 7753.”

The one that looked like a witch, Mana, seemed to be the leader-type.

7753 looked like someone wearing a fancy school uniform. She was also covering her neck with a red scarf. Her eyes looked quite sad.

“I presume you’re all students?”

Wedin and Funny Trick nodded.

Wedin began to speak, “I’m in charge of our group. The Leader. Unfortunately, we’ve run into some trouble. Captain Grace has died.”

Wedin should've chosen her words carefully.

Kuru-Kuru Hime covered her mouth, widened her eyes, and slowly shook her head. Wedin had forgotten that she didn't know about Grace's death.

7753 patted her shoulder, and Hime cried on it silently.

Funny Trick continued,

"We want to work together if that's possible."

"That's what I was thinking as well. We've lost good people too," said Mana.

Tepsekemei then spoke up,

"The rainbow Magical Girl and her friend were in the school, looking for you."
One of them is the Assassin.

Mana nudged Kuru-Kuru Hime for her smartphone, and Hime took it out. Mana revealed the screen, some unknown numbers.

"This is Pythie Frederica's number. She called us earlier suggesting an alliance to take down the Assassin, and possibly even Pukin."

Pythie Frederica. The one who was in charge of the kidnapping, who put Funny Trick through mental torture.

Funny Trick shook her head, "I'm never working with that monster no matter what you tell me."

"I agree, I'm standing by Funny Trick. We'll never work together with her," said Wedin.

Mana nodded, "We weren't planning to. We just wanted you two's opinion. You all should note that there's no way out of this barrier except for Frederica's magic."

"Her magic?" asked Funny Trick.

"Her magic lets her interact with someone, provided she owns a strand of their hair. She can also use it to effectively teleport her or them from one side to the other. That's what I mean," explained Mana.

Wedin spoke up, “That’s not true anymore! We found another way!”

“My magic can teleport two hidden items. We tested this. It works,” claimed Funny Trick.

Mana blinked, “That’s great! You kids can escape then! Find help, get to safety. We’ll handle Pukin, Frederica, and the Assassin.”

Funny Trick looked down, “One problem… My magic doesn’t work on myself.”

“What? You never told me that!” complained Wedin.

“I didn’t want to worry you. In the car crash, I couldn’t teleport myself out. It doesn’t work for me. I’ll still be stuck here.”

“There *has* to be a way to get you out!” said Wedin.

“We’ll think of a plan. For now, I’m just glad that we’re safe,” said Mana as she opened what seemed to be a pill bottle, and chewed on one of the pills.

“What do we do if we escape. We have to stop them, right?”

“None of you are ready for that. Leave it to us. You’re civilians, you need to stay safe,” said Mana.

Wedin had almost forgotten, that in a world of Magical Girls, she was still new, and the others were probably a lot better than her.

She was just a civilian.

But she still wanted to help somehow.

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 4 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

Pythie Frederica was playing with her new cellphone’s settings.

She stole this phone from someone she recently beaten up. Memorized the phone numbers that she had gotten from Kuru-Kuru Hime before.

How did it all come down to this? Why didn’t everything proceed according to plan?

It was Pukin and Sonia Bean. They always threw her plans off-course.

Killing the man when they first got to B-City. Forcefully stealing a car. Killing Kuru-Kuru Hime's father. Killing Captain Grace. Fighting Mao Pam.

Everything was their doing.

None of those things were ever approved by Pythie herself. She's not that stupid to realize that there's more to winning than sheer pride.

But it is partly her own fault for getting them involved in the first place.

Now Tot Pop's dead, and she didn't have any followers or soldiers with her.

Her phone rang. An unknown number. This cellphone wasn't hers, so she assumed it must be for the man.

Regardless, just in case, she answered it.

"*Is this Pythie Frederica*?" said a voice in a strange synthetically modified tone.

Voice modulator.

"Yes. Who is this?"

"*A supporter.*"

"Quite mysterious. I'm going to need more details than that. Are you Tot Pop's sponsor? The one who broke us out?"

"*That's not important. What's important is that I'm here to help you. You require support, yes?*"

"I am quite famished on support, yes. But I don't just accept help because it's handed to me."

"*And that's why I like you, Frederica. You're smart.*"

"Praising me or stroking my ego is a tactic I've used myself, it's not going to work like that, my friend. Tell me, what are the terms?"

"*A short-term alliance. Nothing binding. You can refuse, of course.*"

“Oh, can I? I actually have a choice?”

“*Of course. Though… There aren’t many people in the city who are big fans of you, Frederica. The Investigation Team has their thing, and the Assassin and Pukin don’t much care for you. Without my help, you’re as good as dead.*”

Pythie commended this person. Whoever they are, they’re giving her the illusion of choice. Still, they speak truth.

Alone, Pythie will definitely be outmatched.

“And what will I have to do?”

“*Follow my instructions, and I’ll ensure you make it out alive. If you agree, there’s a construction site that I’d like you to go to. I’ve sent the location to the phone. Call me back when you get there.*”

The caller hung up.

This situation is becoming more and more interesting…

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 3 Hours, 58 Minutes)

This red scarf was given to 7753 by Ripple earlier in the evening, when they were still doing a stealth mission.

She never took it back, and 7753 kept it. Now, it serves as a reminder for Ripple.

Hana died saving Mana. She was killed because she wanted to save them.

Mao Pam died saving Hana. She was killed trying to rescue her.

Ripple died saving Mao Pam. She was trying to find her by following her wings.

Everyone died because they wanted to save someone else.

Now, Mana was suggesting the students to leave. She’s going to die trying to save everyone here.

The students have been through so much. Becoming a Magical Girl, watching one of their own die, sticking together, and apparently tortured as well.

Everyone was selfless.

But 7753… 7753 just followed instructions from her mentor. She trusted her mentor, but why did she follow instructions from her blindly?

She wanted to live, but it feels as if she's being selfish in this case.

Maybe this is why she was never in the field. A Magical Girl has to be a selfless individual, and 7753 couldn't bring herself to do that. She was scared of doing that.

If it came down to it, would she choose her own life over someone else's?

7753 grabbed the red scarf around her neck.

Ripple never told 7753 her story. 7753 wished she could know her better. After all, she was supposed to be Ripple's probation officer.

7753. Things are getting bad here.

With the news that Frederica may have a way out of the barrier, the Land of Magic doesn't think making it a dead zone is enough.

They're in discussion of using lethal force.

The words appeared in her goggles again.

Worst-case scenario, they're going to wipe B-City and its surroundings off the map. I'm trying to negotiate with some other high ranking officers to prevent that.

It's still in consideration phases, and not everyone is on board with this idea, but the idea of Pukin and Frederica running free, as well as the Assassin, is not looking good for the Land of Magic right now.

Good luck, 7753. I'm going to cut off communications again. The meeting will start soon.

Your best bet is to escape the city. If you do, you won't be killed if they decide to do it. Stay safe.

Here it is again.

Following instructions. Escaping the city would be possible, and 7753 could easily lie and say she'll get reinforcements.

However, she'll be abandoning a lot of people to their deaths.

Follow the instructions of the mentor, and she might be considered the worst Magical Girl, as well as the guilt she'll feel.

Disobey her mentor, and she's putting her life in danger, not to mention her job in the Human Resources Division.

She has decided.

7753 looked towards the group.

"Guys… I have something to tell you. I haven't been… completely honest."

She got everyone's attention with that line. They were all waiting on her patiently.

"Throughout this time… Most of what I suggested. The things we did. They were all orders from my mentor."

"What?" asked Mana, in disbelief. "What do you mean?"

"In the karaoke bar, I knew what to say to defuse the situation between you and me. When we were making teams on how to attack the students… When I suggested that I pair up with you instead of Hana, that was my boss, too. Then… when we…"

Mana approached 7753.

7753 continued, "…When we decided on a place to camp in case Hana came back, I… The alley.. I… That wasn't me. That was my boss."

Mana grabbed 7753's collar. 7753 expected Mana to scream at her, to try to punch her or beat her up.

Instead, what she saw was Mana's face, disheartened, holding back tears, and saddened.

"…Hana *trusted* you," said Mana.

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you, earlier.”

“I don’t want apologies, I want my sister back.”

“Wait… There’s another thing. My boss, she told me that the Land of Magic is considering… lethal force.”

Mana released her grip. She adjusted her glasses, and her eyes seem shocked.

“They wouldn’t…”

“It’s under consideration. Because Mao Pam was killed, I think…”

Wedin stood up, “Wait! Please, what’s going on?”

Mana glanced at Wedin, “They’re going to level the city to kill an Assassin.”

“Huh!? But… won’t people notice? That’s not right! That’s not morally right!” shouted Wedin.

“It’s easy to alter people’s minds to believe it was some kind of natural disaster. That part they’re not worried about,” said Mana.

“But that’s not what Magical Girls do… Magical Girls *save* people! They’re the good guys!! You can’t tell me with a straight face that your organization of *real* Magical Girls would even *consider* this!? All the Anime, Manga… Cutie Healer… All those messages about dreams and magic! They’re just lies in that case!” ranted Wedin as tears began to stream from her face.

Mana looked at Wedin and walked towards her.

“You’re right. This isn’t what a Magical Girl would do. This is what a bunch of scared, corrupted politicians would do. Magical Girls fight for justice, right?” said Mana calmly.

Wedin’s face was red. The others were just staring at the scene, unable to process what’s going to happen.

“Wedin, wasn’t it? You’re more of a Magical Girl than those bureaucrats up there in their desks and meetings. You’re out here, trying to protect your friends. That’s what being a Magical Girl is about.”

Wedin tried to regain her composure. Mana gave her a small hug. She then continued speaking,

“Take it from me. Don’t believe in an image of Magical Girls that’s shown to you, by an Anime or a Manga. Believe in the Magical Girl in you. Your ideals should stand before anything else.”

Wedin slowly nodded.

“That’s why you have to survive. Leave. Let me handle them. You too, 7753,” said Mana.

“What? Me? I can’t just leave! I spent the whole mission lying to you, I can’t in good conscience leave you alone, Mana!”

“That’s an order. You’re the only one with information to expose the corruption inside of the Land of Magic. There’s good people there, too. Plus, you can’t fight. You and the students need to leave to safety somehow. We’ll find a way to get Funny Trick outside the barrier too.”

“But what about you?”

“Best case scenario, I stop Pukin, Frederica, and the Assassin. Worst case? I die trying, but they’ll die too.”

There was some silence as 7753 understood the weight of what those words meant.

Mana closed her eyes and smiled,

“But hey, at least I can meet Hana again, right?”

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 3 Hours, 58 Minutes)**

Pythie had arrived at the designated location. She turned on her cellphone and set it to loudspeaker.

“*Good. Now I need you to cause as much chaos as you can.*”

“Is there a point to this?”

"*Yes. We're going to kill two birds with one stone.*"

"Meaning?"

"*What does chaos attract?*"

"Ah… You want to bait the stronger Magical Girls? Pukin… and the Investigation Team?

"*Something like that.*"

"I like the way you think. Let them fight amongst each other. Very well… At the very least, I know that if this plan fails, it'll be on you, not me."

"*Oh, it won't fail. I've made sure of it.*"

When the voice clicked off. Pythie ran down the building wall, and jumped towards a nearby car, crushing it with her landing.

She broke the glass, pulled the driver out, ad lifted the car, throwing it towards a nearby taxi.

She caused the traffic to be even more chaotic, with explosions happening everywhere.

A nearby gas station. Perfect. She threw a car towards it, and the explosion should attract even *more* attention.

Pythie was sure that the police would show up, but she was hoping that other Magical Girls would as well.

With the chaos sown, Pythie retreated, and she waited to see if this plan would come to fruition.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 3 Hours, 30 Minutes)**

Rain Pou had arrived at the scene of the disaster.

Another fight? Something like this was usually caused by Pukin. She had a contract on her as well.

No sign of anyone nearby.

She created a rainbow bridge and walked across it with Postarie, landing on a nearby hotel overlooking the entire scene.

That's when she heard Postarie scream.

Behind them was indeed who she was looking for, with a rapier at the ready, standing on the other side of the building, was Pukin.

The orange haired Magical Girl grinned madly as she made a mad dash towards Rain Pou.

Rain Pou erected a wall of rainbows to block her pursuit.

She immediately grabbed Postarie's hand, walked back, turned around, and quickly jumped to a rainbow bridge.

When she turned, the wall crumbled, and Pukin continued her chase

Rain Pou would grab Postarie, jump, and launch a rainbow at Pukin, but Pukin herself was too fast, dodging it and jumping to other buildings as well.

Rain Pou had an element of advantage. Her bridges allowed her to bypass jumping across buildings, and she was using that method to escape.

Holding Postarie's hand, she jumped towards another building. Unlike Ripple, who's weapons were homing. Pukin was a close-range combatant, so Rain Pou just needed to keep her distance.

Rainbow after rainbow, she launched it towards the swordsman.

Pukin dodged some, she jumped over and ran across some, and occasionally she'd try to outmaneuver them, but she could never catch up.

Rain Pou needed to finish her off here and now, a one-to-one fight wouldn't work.
If this continues, they'll have to retreat. Rain Pou worked best if she had the element of surprise.

Caw!! Caw!!

Suddenly, a murder of crows surrounded Rain Pou, catching her by surprise. Dozens of crows flocked her and Postarie, who screamed in fear.

The crows then grabbed Toko and flew off, towards Pukin.

“RAIN POU! HELP! AAAAH”

She could only hear the cries, as the crows continued to blur her vision. Finally, when the crows dissipated, she saw Pukin, standing on another building far away, holding Toko in her hand.

“Choose! Your friend! Or your Fairy!”

Though she was speaking English, Rain Pou could understand those parts.

Toko was struggling as hard as she could. Attempting to release herself from Pukin’s hand. All the while, Pukin was laughing madly.

The laughter was like that of a mad dog. She seemed to enjoy watching Toko struggle. Her laughter made her bend over as Pukin tried to contain her glee.

During that moment, Toko slipped out.

She got herself free from Pukin, and flew as fast as she can to Rain Pou.

“Hey! Get back here, you little bastard!” screamed out Pukin in anger, her eyes wild like a wolf.

“Rain Pou!” screamed Toko in fear.

“Toko, come on!” said Rain Pou. Toko immediately ran straight towards Rain Pou, diving into her chest pocket.

That’s when she felt a sharp pain in her chest. Like a needle was sticking into her.

When she looked down, she saw a left hand holding a knife.

That left hand seemed cut, but there was some sort of aura that made it seem like it wasn’t cut. This was…

…Frederica?

Rain Pou thought fast, and immediately sliced the left hand in two with her rainbow. The hand fell onto the ground, blood pouring all over the floor.

The knife fell as well, but Rain Pou wasn't bleeding.

"Ahahaha!!! Wonderful!"

She heard Pukin's voice from behind her. She looked around nad saw Pukin, sword at the ready, facing her.

How did she get behind her!?

"Surprise!"

Rain Pou reacted. She launched a rainbow straight towards Pukin, and it managed to catch Pukin by surprise as well.

"Gk! Ngah…"

The rainbow went straight through her stomach. Pukin dropped her rapier, and began coughing up blood.

Rain Pou looked at Pukin, satisfied, with a smile. She removed the rainbow, and Pukin fell to her knees.

Her eyes seemed scared, and Pukin looked up at Rain Pou as she held her stomach, now bleeding.

Then, Pukin fell down, and lay down on the ground.

That was a close call…

…But where's Postarie?

Did Pukin already kill her? No, that shouldn't happen. She was with Rain Pou a while ago. Where did she go?

Did she run to safety?

"Looking for your friend?" said a voice in her head.

The voice of Pukin.

She can understand her?

But Pukin is dead, right in front of her. How is she speaking.

“Did you think I was just a mad swordsman, Assassin? HAHAHA!”

Where is she!? How can she speak in her mind? Telepathy? What is this?

“Did you know that a group of crows is called a *murder*? I quite like that name. It’s easy to control if you can control the leader. All those crows for the price of one. If only it were that simple, hmm?”

Rain Pou felt her head ringing.

“When your Fairy came to me, I had the crows distract you. I already had her under my control. Slipping free? Getting angry? That was part of our ruse. Look at the *hand* you’ve cut, Assassin.”

Rain Pou looked down, and to her horror, saw Toko bisected in two, with a piece of Pukin’s rapier, broken off.

“That’s right… She stabbed you. You’ve been outplayed, Assassin. Accept it. Become my loyal servant.”

She’d been outplayed…

…It makes sense now.

That wasn’t Pukin behind her. That was Postarie. She had been outplayed. It makes sense now. She should accept it.

The real Pukin walked towards her.

“As my first decree, I want you to mutilate the body. Call it a parting trial. Shedding the skin, like a snake. That’s what you are, aren’t you? A snake. Go. Mutilate your friend, and devote yourself to me.”

Rain Pou nodded.

Toko had always shown her the joy and fun of being on your own. Of being independent. Of being a criminal.

Postarie, however, was her real friend. A friend she could talk to, could laugh to, could enjoy things with.

She wanted to protect Postarie. In order to keep her criminal side justified, she always tried to say that it was because she would make for a good hostage.

But in reality, she wanted to protect Postarie.

Rain Pou's head felt cold. She saw Postarie's body, now back as Tatsuko.

She cut her with her rainbows. To tiny pieces. She wouldn't stop. The pieces were cut into more pieces.

She can't stop. Not until Pukin is satisfied.

Shedding her skin, becoming loyal and devoted.

She can't stop. Tatsuko was being cut into pieces.

A new master, a new purpose.

She can't stop.

She can't stop…

Chapter 12
The Magical Girl in You

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 3 Hours, 45 Minutes)**

"I'm staying."

7753 was adamant. She took Mana's hand.

"There's nothing you can do to stop me, Mana."

"You're going to get yourself killed, and you're going to get in my way if you stay," said Mana, swatting away 7753's hand.

"Mana, you can't be the only one in this. You can't fight them off alone. That's suicidal!"

“I’m the *only* one with combat experience, out of all of us. That’s saying something. I’m not trying to be suicidal, 7753. I’m stating the facts. None of you have fought on the level that those two have. I can’t, not in good conscience, let you stay.”

Wedin’s head was spinning. With this argument, she was already thinking about what will happen.

3 hours.

Are they really going to destroy her hometown? Everything she had?

“E-Excuse me… I have to go,” said Wedin, not waiting for a response from the two senior Magical Girls.

Wedin went over to the corner where the other Namiyama High Magical Girls were. All of them appeared as if they’ve gotten disheartened.

They’ve been through so much.

Funny Trick was sitting in a fetal position, shivering.

Kuru-Kuru Hime had her face down.

Tepsekemei, Wedin couldn’t tell from her expression, but she wasn’t as happy-go-lucky as before.

Wedin remembered the 10 years she spent living in B-City. The school she goes to, her friends there.

The library that she goes to whenever she wants to spend time alone, and the helpful librarian that always helped her.

Her favorite teacher in school, who always discussed her lessons with her.

Her house… Her family…

All of it will be gone. Unless they do the impossible task of defeating some of the most powerful Magical Girls they’ve met.

Everything seemed hopeless.

But is all hope really lost?

Believe in the Magical Girl in you.

Does that mean anything anymore? Wedin was just a Magical Girl fan. The shows she watched, they're nothing compared to what reality can throw at her.

Wedin felt her hand being held.

Tepsekemei.

She was looking straight at Wedin't face, holding both of her hands.

"Wedin, do you have any orders?"

"Orders?"

"Wedin is our leader. Mei will follow you, always."

That's right.

She *is* their leader. Some leader she was… Letting many of her team get killed. However, she was still their leader.

And great leaders triumph in the face of danger.

A city is about to be destroyed, villains are rampaging, and nobody is thinking about the one thing they should be thinking about.

Just do the right thing.

Wedin was afraid to die.

But if she doesn't do anything, everyone will die. Despite all the politics Mana's talking about, despite all the suffering they've endured, despite everything else that mattered.

If there was one thing Wedin learned from all those Magical Girl shows she watched,

Just do the right thing.

There is a chance that they'll fail. However, if they don't do anything, they *will* fail. Right now, nobody in town knows what will happen.

Right now, people need heroes.

All this time, Wedin had been a fan of Magical Girl series, but this is the kind of test that determines whether or not she was a true Magical Girl.

So that's what it means.

No matter how much suffering you endure, no matter how much you'll have to lose, the one thing that springs to mind, to keep fighting on…

Believe in the Magical Girl in you.

Wedin has decided.

"Everyone. I have an announcement!"

Funny Trick and Kuru-Kuru Hime glanced to her. Wedin felt a sense of embarrassment, like she's about to present a school project.

That feeling is a nice feeling in a time like this.

"I'm going to stay, and I'm going to fight. I'm a Magical Girl, and I'm going to do my part so that our home won't be destroyed. I'm not asking you to join me, and I'm not kidding when I think… there is a high possibility we won't make it out of this… But for me, as long as we save this city, it'll be worth it."

Wedin paused.

Her speech was just that. A speech. What she really wanted to say was,

"…All I'm trying to say. Please take some time to think. If you're with me, say so. I'm not going to command you to stand by my side."

"Mei will join. Mei will join always," said Tepsekemei.

Wedin smiled.

Tepsekemei looked at her blankly, but Wedin knew her true feelings bursting through that face.

☆ **Funny Trick (Remaining Time: 3 Hours, 33 Minutes)**

This is all a lie, right?

This is all a dream, right?

The city won't be destroyed, right?

Why should I die for this?

Why did this happen?

Funny Trick never wanted to be a Magical Girl in the first place. Nobody listened to her when she told them Toko was bad news.

Now everything will be gone.

But…

…There is one conflict inside Funny Trick that still remains to be seen to its conclusion.

Umi Shihabara.

Funny Trick hated her clinginess, but she also admired some things about her. Her pure unadulterated love for adventure.

Umi…

Umi definitely wasn't perfect, and she can be dense as well.

But Umi never gave up, to a fault. Funny Trick still couldn't believe that some part of her was happy for Umi's death.

It's one thing to dislike a person due to their personality…

…It's another thing entirely to be happy with their death.

Perhaps Umi can be annoying, but she didn't deserve to die. Nobody really deserves to die for something like that.

Funny Trick didn't want to see herself as a monster. Happy that someone died. If that was the case, Umi never deserved someone like Funny Trick as a friend.

There was always two sides to a story.

Funny Trick just couldn't communicate her side towards Umi, or maybe she didn't even listen. Maybe, if there was ever a chance to rewind time…

…Umi considered Funny Trick her best friend, didn't she?

Some friend. Wanting her dead.

C'mon, you gotta try it out, Kayo!

It's dangerous, Umi…

You might like it! Who knows?

I'm pretty sure I won't.

How do you know if you haven't tried it?

I just… know, okay?

Hmm… Hey, Kayo. You sometimes act a little weird, y'know?

Huh?

Around me. Sometimes. I think I've figured it out…

Er…

You wanna beat me at my own game, dontcha? That's the spirit!

Oh, yeah. Yeah…

Well then you gotta start expanding your borders, y'know! Don't be scared, just… give it a shot! If you fail, nobody's gonna care

Umi…

Tryin' to help you out, here! C'mon, show me your game face!

Funny Trick chuckled to herself.

There were moments. There were definitely good moments with Umi. Not all of them were bad.

Nobody was truly all bad.

And she had a point.

Funny Trick shouldn't give up hope. Despite how impossible the odds are, she was still the only one capable of stopping the city from getting destroyed.

She rubbed her face dry, tears staining it.

She stood up,

"Wedin. I'm in."

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 3 Hours, 33 Minutes)**

Kuru-Kuru Hime has lost everything.

Her father.

Her students.

Her right as a teacher.

Her innocence.

She was about to lose something else as well. She was about to lose the city she lived in for years. Along with all the people inside of the city.

She failed to protect her students as a teacher.

She failed to protect her father as a daughter.

Hime remembered a memory when she was younger. She came to pick up her father in the train station after a long few days without seeing him.

She was very young, and she found her father instantly in a crowed of people.

Nozomi loved her father, and he always protected her, and guided her to help people, as a teacher.

He taught her how to have hope…

“Hey, you found me, Nozomi!”

“Never going to forget your face, daddy!”

…And now he was taken away from her.

Tears began streaming down her face. For the first time in her life, Kuru-Kuru Hime felt *angry*. She was angry at the fact that her father was taken away from her.

She was angry that she couldn’t protect her students.

She was angry that the people in this city were going to be destroyed without a second thought.

She wanted to channel that anger, to protect the people that’s left.

She had been passive before, but now, more than ever…

…She wanted to fight.

Kuru-Kuru Hime stood up, determined that this was her final decision.

“Wedin. I’m fighting too.”

☆ **Mana (Remaining Time: 3 Hours, 28 Minutes)**

Wedin, Funny Trick, Kuru-Kuru Hime, and Tepsekemei approached Mana.

Wedin stood in front of them all, and she spoke out, as the leader of the Namiyama High Magical Girls.

“We’re not leaving either, Mana. We don’t care what you or your organization thinks. We’re staying.”

“Are you people crazy or something!? I’m trying to save you all! You’re civilians, 7753 has little combat experience. Just because we throw more Magical Girls doesn’t mean we’ll win!”

7753 shook her head,

“No. I’m done taking orders, Mana. I’m with them. We’re backing you up. Our higher-ups may want to blow this city, but I can’t let that.”

“Neither can I, 7753, but how the hell are you guys supposed to turn the tide?” asked Mana.

It was a legitimate question.

Mana didn’t want anyone else to die. Throwing inexperienced Magical Girls at the problem isn’t going to help things.

Pythie, Pukin, the Assassin.

All of them were experienced combatants. Mana had been in combat before, but she was a Mage, not a Magical Girl.

7753 then spoke up, “Y’know. I may not be able to fight, but I *do* have scouting experience. I’m from the Human Resources Division remember? I’m not just some useless dead weight.”

“7753, nobody’s calling you dead we-”

“No, Mana, listen. My goggles. They can scan… *everything*. Most Magical Girls have to train for years to find out the limits of their powers. I can do this for you in an hour tops. I can train you guys so that you’ll be able to use them like veterans.”

7753 slipped down her goggles. She smiled, looking at the Namiyama High School students. She pointed at Wedin,

“You. Wedin. Your promise magic is powerful. It’ll persist permanently. We can use that.”
7753 held her hand out to Mana,

“C’mon, Mana. Trust us. Accept our help.”

You should learn to trust people. It could save your life.

Mana’s going to regret this.

She accepted 7753’s hand, and shook it, nodding, as everyone else smiled, ready to fight. But before a fight, they need a plan.

She took out some items from her 4-Dimensional Bag, and spread it out.

“There’s still some healing medicine, smoke bombs, anything you might need for protection and equipment. Decide who best to carry each item. I only have a limited amount,” said Mana.

Mana looked at Wedin, “Also. You. I just might have an idea on how to use your powers.”

Wedin tilted her head, “What do you mean?”

“We’re going to outplay Pythie Frederica.”

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 2 Hours, 56 Minutes)**

“*Status report?*”

“Well, you want the short version, or the long version?”

“*Just tell me what happened*.”

“Pukin has Rain Pou under her control. Postarie’s dead. Toko’s dead too.”

There was silence on the other end of the line.

“*You’ve fulfilled your bargain. You’re free to proceed however you like*.”

“Just like that, you’re planning to leave? Mysterious, aren’t you?”

“*Oh I have a feeling you’ll have more on your hands than I do*.”

Click.

The phone went silent. Pythie also thought about her next move. Right now, she was in no position to strike at all.

The Investigation Team is her only hope.

She needed her crystal ball in order for her to be able to do any damage.

She's confident that she'll find a plan regardless, but without that main plan, most of her others will probably fail.

She can't take on Pukin and Rain Pou by herself.

Her phone started vibrating again.

This time it's not the unknown number. It's from Kuru-Kuru Hime's phone.

Oh… so they've decided.

"Hello? Mana?"

"No. Wedin."

Oh…?

"What brings you to contact me, Wedin? I see you've met the investigation team."

"I have. We're here to offer an alliance."

"So you *have* agreed?"

"With a few conditions."

"Hmhmhm, at least I know you're not stupid. Very well, what are these conditions?"

"You'll need to make three promises."

"Promises?"

“First, you must promise not to take hostile action against any of us. Second, you must promise to tell the truth, and only the truth. Third, you must promise that when the barrier is over, you won’t subject any of us to your powers.”

Pythie thought long and hard about this proposition.

While she may be hindering herself in the long run, she can’t think of any way that she might want to use her powers against those Magical Girls specifically.

They want safety.

Pythie wants a way out.

This is beneficial, for now.

“Very well. I promise to all those terms.”

“Then it’s settled. First, tell us everything you know.”

“Alright. Pukin has abandoned me, or rather, she already planned to from the beginning. I just ran away before the situation got worse. She has Rain Pou under control. Postarie and Toko’s dead.”

There was silence at the end of the line.

3 seconds passed.

“How do you know all this?”

“Because I was watching them from afar. Now, have I satisfied your questioning?”

“Yes. We’ll send you a meeting location. Wait for us there.”

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 2 Hours, 35 Minutes)

Face to face.

Pythie Frederica was someone that was calm, 7753 can say. Despite being alone, disadvantaged, and at the mercy of Wedin’s promise, her smirk still says that she hasn’t lost.

7753 can't tell if she was faking it, or if she was legitimately confident that she can still make it out on top.

Either way, Pythie is face to face with 4 Magical Girls who were *angry* at her.

Tepsekemei, who's friends were hurt by her.

Wedin, who was brainwashed and forced to betray her friends by her.

Funny Trick, who was mentally broken and forced to deal with her inner self by her.

Kuru-Kuru Hime, who had her father brutally murdered by her.

All four of them looked at rage towards Pythie Frederica, and Frederica herself?

She was just *smiling*.

"If it's any consolation, I can tell you that all the suffering you've gone through wasn't directly caused by my commands. Pukin was the one that always pulled the trigger without me supervising," said Pythie with a matter-of-fact tone.

"You're still part of the problem," said Wedin.

"It's the truth, though. I can't lie, remember?" said Pythie with a grin.

Mana approached Pythie, "Well we're not here to antagonize each other. We need a plan to take out Pukin and the Assassin."

"Rain Pou? That'll be hard. The two are together now. Although, if I had my crystal ball," said Pythie, looking at Funny Trick.

"Uh-Uh, not yet. Not until I have your guarantee that you won't betray us," said Mana.

“Pukin won’t accept me into her ranks. There’s no point betraying you to her. She’s mad. I want her as dead as you do. Now, what’s going to happen to me once this barrier is down, Mana?”

“You go back to prison. No questions asked.”

“Oh my, I really don’t want that. I don’t even get some compensation?”

“A fair trial’s all I can offer. One that you’ll lose.”

Pythie closed her eyes and smiled, “Very well. I guess it can’t be helped. Now then, my crystal ball?”

Funny Trick reluctantly handed over the ball towards Pythie.

“In order to make this simple, may I have a strand of each of your hair? It’ll be easier to coordinate. Don’t worry, I made a promise not to bother you all once this is over, remember?”

The four girls looked at each other nervously. They nodded, and each pulled out a strand to be given to Pythie.

“Now then, I assume you all have a plan to deal with this, yes?” asked Pythie.

“We split them up. Handle them both separately,” said Mana.

“Interesting. And how will this involve me?” asked Pythie.

“Well, listen closely because we only have 2 hours to do this,” said Mana.

☆ **Pukin (Remaining Time: 1 Hour, 25 Minutes)**

Pukin ate.

She needed the strength for when the inevitable will happen. The food that she placed in her mouth crunched in her teeth.

Red liquid spilled through her mouth.

She swallowed.

Fairy meat was very nutritious. Not many people know this, but it strengthens a Magical Girl if eaten. This is because their magic is stored within them, and eating it results in powering up a Magical Girl considerably.

All these new ‘Cyber Fairies’ were a waste. Digital constructs. Nothing like the real ones.

Pukin was bored.

She wanted Sonia back. She wanted to kill the ones who came after her. She wanted to kill people in general.

“Bring me more food!”

“Yes, master.”

Rain Pou said this in a monotone voice. She went to the fridge, picked up as much food as she can get, and placed it on the table.

Pukin wanted some fun, or at least entertainment.

“Go down to the city. Kill every man, woman, and child you see. Create fires as large as you can, destroy buildings, and most definitely… if you see any of those Magical Girls… *kill them*.”

“Yes, master.”

“One more thing. That wedding dressed girl. I don’t want her stealing you from me. Take precautions if you see her.”

“Yes, master.”

Rain Pou walked outside the room.

Five minutes later, Pukin heard screams from down the streets. She heard cars crashing. She heard explosions.

Pukin stood up and watched from the windowsill.

Ah, yes… Now this might be the entertainment she needed.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 1 Hour, 5 Minutes)**

Pukin’s orders must be obeyed.

There’s no other purpose to it.

Rain Pou looked for people, and she sliced them with her rainbow. She looked for cars, buildings, and sliced them with her rainbows.

She went to the supermarket.

“Where are the matches?” she asked the store owner.

They ran away.

She sliced them with her rainbows.

She grabbed the matches, she lit them, and spread fire throughout the buildings. All of this was because of Pukin’s orders.

All of them was for Pukin.

“What are you doing?”

She heard a voice in the sky. A flying Arabic-dressed Magical Girl.

Rain Pou launched multiple rainbows to her assailant. However, although she sliced her up to multiple pieces, they simply thinned and reformed somewhere else, like air.

“So you really are the enemy,” said the girl.

Tepsekemei.

That means the others may be close by. Wedin, Funny Trick, Kuru-Kuru Hime.

But Tepsekemei had to be dealt with first.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 58 Minutes)**

According to 7753, Wedin's magic is as follows:

She is able to seal any promise made.

A promise is considered a promise if it is an agreement between two or more parties.

There can be multiple promises agreed to at once.

If a promise contradicts a previously made promise. The new promise takes precedene.

The conditions of the promise cannot be cheated upon. It is, however, subjective to Wedin's point of view. Meaning that she determines what the promise means.

If the conditions of fulfilling a promise seem blurry, then Wedin's definition of fulfilling it takes precedence.

The effect of the promise is permanent unless agreed upon beforehand.

The promise she made with her classmates when she was chosen to become their leader covered her entire Magical Girl team, and that included Rain Pou.

But will it work against Pukin's mind control?

Pythie was using Tepsekemei's hair to witness the fight. Rain Pou seems to be aggressive with her use of rainbows, but Tepsekemei's just ignoring all of them.

It's clear that she isn't trying to fight back, however.

Tepsekemei was a decoy, and a receiver for Pythie's crystal ball, so that she can keep an eye on Rain Pou.

"Well, do you think it'll work?" asked Pythie.

"Possibly."

It'll work.

The conditions of the promise are subjective to Wedin, so if Wedin considered Rain Pou part of her promise, and believed it, then it will be so.

“Send me in,” said Wedin.

Pythie pushed Wedin through her crystal ball, and Wedin appeared in behind Rain Pou.

Rain Pou turned around.

“Rain Pou! Stop moving!”

Rain Pou tilted her head, and she launched a rainbow headed straight towards Wedin.

It didn’t work

Wedin felt the back of her dress being pulled, and suddenly she was back with Pythie.

“Why didn’t it work?” asked Pythie.

“I don’t know!”

Frederica took a look at Rain Pou, via Tepsekemei’s hair. She zoomed in on her ears.

“Oh my… now *that* is smart,” said Pythie.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 55 Minutes)**

Wedin’s magic is powerful. It will be able to make Rain Pou do anything she orders.

It was part of the promise they made.

When Rain Pou heard Wedin’s voice, she immediately materialized a small spherical rainbow ball.

She materialized two of them directly in her earlobes.

Ear plugs.

She couldn’t hear anything now. She didn’t have to hear anything. She was a trained Assassin. She knew how to feel the air and to use her other senses for combat.

Being deafened isn’t going to stop her.

Now, to deal with Tepsekemei.

Direct attacks won't work against her. Rain Pou knows the rainbows still slice her, but she just becomes windlike.

Air cannot be sliced, because they'll just separate and reform.

However, there is something you can do to air.

Trap it.

Rain Pou materialized a rainbow behind Tepsekemei, pointing upwards, curling downwards, curling left, curling right.

Mei thinned herself to air, but was confused, as she can't pass through the rainbows.

Rainbow over rainbow.

She was wrapping it around in the air, creating a giant sphere made of rainbows. Locked tight. She could see Mei attempting to break out, but it was impossible for her.

The sphere stayed.

Tepsekemei was trapped.

☆ **Pukin (Remaining Time: 55 Minutes)**

There was a crashing sound heard in the kitchen.

Who was that?

Frederica?

One of the Investigation Team?

Pukin drew her rapier. She killed her footsteps, and she walked as slowly as she could., approaching the kitchen.

She took a small peek.

Nobody was there.

Strange…

Swish

Pukin heard a soft noise behind her. Immediately, she reacted, and cut two ribbons aiming straight for her.

“Not bad! Sneaking up on me like that. A wonderful strategy! Now please tell me you had a backup,” said Pukin grinning, as she leaped through the window.

Landing on the streets, she saw a pink ballerina jumping and leaping using ropes.

Pukin gave chase, but the ballerina was fast.

The ballerina, mid-air, created two large ribbons around her arms. She twirled them in a circle around each arm, and when she landed in the ground, the ribbons functioned as gigantic wheels.

The ballerina sped up faster than Pukin can chase her, using her circular ribbons to speed through the city.

Because they were ribbons, they didn’t crush any cars they passed through, and because they were controlled by her spinning, the speed she was going to was fast.

Despite that, Pukin was still able to keep up.

Where is she going?

The chase led her to the outskirts of the city.

This was a wide area, a clearing with almost little to no buildings. There were trees around, though.

A lumbermill station.

A trap? Or just a place for a fair fight.

The ballerina stood her ground, with eyes of anger directed at Pukin. Further ahead, Pukin saw a girl with goggles.

“G-Guys, be careful! Her stats just got an incredible boost for some reason!”

Ah, so she can read Pukin’s stats?

That would make sense why Pukin got a boost. Eating a Fairy was the reason. As fairies are highly nutritious to Magical Girls, they can boost your potential easily.

Pukin brandished her rapier, the ballerina began twirling her ribbons.

Two warriors ready for combat.

☆ **Wedin (Remaining Time: 55 Minutes)**

“What’s your next plan?” asked Pythie.

“What’s she doing now?” asked Wedin.

“Well, she seems to trapped your little friend in a rainbow sphere, and is currently en route to destroy more of the city.”

Pythie was still able to follow the movements of Rain Pou via Tepsekemei. Although she was trapped in a rainbow sphere, Rain Pou kept the sphere travelling with her, as she didn’t want the sphere to disintegrate out of her sight.

“Send me in there,” said Wedin.

“What exactly do you plan to do?”

“Fight her. Help me out. With your powers, we could teleport and fight her that way!”

“Now what kind of coordination would that take?”

“Just do it, already!”

“Alright, alright, you’re the boss.”

Wedin was pushed through the crystal ball. She punched Rain Pou. As Rain Pou prepared to launch a rainbow, Wedin was pulled back.

She was pushed to the other side. She kicked her, and was pulled back.

She was pushed again, and again, and again…

But this time.

Rain Pou readied herself.

The moment Wedin showed up, Rain Pou kicked her across the roof.

Wedin was pulled back.

“Well, obviously that didn’t work,” said Pythie.

“Shut up…”

“Wedin. I have a plan. A plan that mostly requires you to stand still while I initiate it. Though, I do have a question.”

“What?”

“Which do you value more? Your life? Or the lives of the people in this city?”

“Do you even have to ask. The innocents, of course.”

“Very well. Listen carefully to what I say, and we may be able to defeat her. Just one thing. Do you trust me?”

“I hate you, but I trust you.”

“I’m hurt.”

“I don’t care.”

☆ **Kuru-Kuru Hime (Remaining Time: 45 Minutes)**

According to 7753, Kuru-Kuru Hime’s powers worked as such,

She can summon ribbons from any part of her outift.

The ribbons’ thickness can be freely adjusted by Kuru-Kuru Hime.

Kuru-Kuru Hime doesn’t need to move her arms to control her ribbons, she need only use her mind.

The ribbons move faster than she can think. Faster than a Magical Girl even.

The size can be decided by Kuru-Kuru Hime.

There is almost no limit to how many ribbons she can control, the only limit is her own mind.

Pukin approached her. Her strength was far higher than what 7753 predicted. But this is their last stand, here and now.

Nearby was the barrier, confirmed by Mana.

They fought in a place where they can easily see each other in the open.

The only one who could handle Pukin in a direct fight, out of all of them, is Kuru-Kuru Hime.

The burden of protecting not only the students, but these officials from the Land of Magic lies on Kuru-Kuru Hime.

If she loses…

…It's game over. For everyone. Not just her. Not just the Investigation Team.

The whole city will be wiped off the map.

She can't lose.

Pukin rushed in fast, moving in for a quick stab with her rapier.

Kuru-Kuru Hime's ribbons blocked the incoming rapier shot and deflected it. Pukin seemed surprised, but as Hime can adjust the thickness of the ribbons, she can make it as hard or soft as she wanted.

Pukin struck again, and Hime deflected everything blow for blow, using her ribbons as a defense.

She can't risk an attack. Not yet.

Pukin's mad attacks grew faster and stronger. Hime just had to time every strike right. The ribbons move faster than she can think, so instinct helped her here.

An opening!

Hime launched a thinly sized ribbon, sharpened, and began stabbing at Pukin. Various other ribbons began stabbing Pukin's body as well.

Pukin screamed as she stood back and began deflecting each of the miniature threads.

She began using the larger ribbons as whips to attack Pukin, while her thinner ones functioned as stabbing appendages.

Pukin endured it, and ran straight towards Kuru-Kuru Hime. This charge can't be stopped or deflected.

Hime thought fast. She created a ribbon focusing on her left forearm, twirling it into a circle over and over and over. Covering the holes as fast as she can.

She created a circular ribbon shield, placed directly in her forearm.

With her ribbon shield, she blocked Pukin's shoulder charge, as Pukin continued her relentless onslaught.

Hime was pushed back onto the defense. She had to push forward.

She jumped towards a tree branch, intending to gain some distance, and Pukin immediately responded by kicking the tree, making it fall.

Hime jumped away, rolling on the ground. Now she has some amount of space.

Shield on her left hand. She needed a weapon to match Pukin's sword.

On her right forearm, she created a ribbon that twirled in a conic shape, centering on her right hand.

Afterwards, she quickly spun the ribbons and twirled it, and kept it spinning.

This was her weapon.

A drill arm.

Pukin clashed. Rapier against drill. Hime pushed forward with her ribbon drill, as Pukin deflected each shot.

Pukin pushed forward with her rapier, as Hime blocked it with her shield.

Kuru-Kuru Hime wasn't intending to win a one-on-one fight. She just had to get Pukin into position. She needed to get Pukin within eyeshot of someone else.

Come on…

Just endure.

☆ **Rain Pou (Remaining Time: 37 Minutes)**

Frederica appeared next.

Rain Pou was expecting Wedin. She chased Frederica across the rooftops, as she tried to shoot rainbow after rainbow.

But Frederica was fast.

It didn't matter.

Rain Pou needed to chase her.

Would Frederica abandon Wedin? Frederica valued her own life over others. It's part of her personality.

Rain Pou needed to kill her.

She must follow Pukin's orders.

Frederica dived into the streets below, and Rain Pou followed her.

Frederica may be leading her to a trap, but soon she'll run out of running space. It didn't matter. Rain Pou had to kill her.

Where was she going?

Frederica looked back occasionally, dodging every rainbow attempt. She clearly had a destination, however.

Rain Pou saw where Frederica was headed.

A train station.

Frederica crashed through the door, jumped over the ticket stall.

Ah, now it makes sense why she ran a few times around the city. She was timing it so that when she arrived at the station, she could dive into a train.

It didn't matter. Fighting in a narrow space like a train is useful for Rain Pou.

Frederica dived into one of the train cars, making a sharp right inside the train and out of sight of Rain Pou, but Rain Pou dashed her way inside as well, determined to catch her prey.

However…

…When she went inside, she didn't see Frederica.

Who she saw instead was Wedin.

There was Wedin in the train, carrying a piece of A4 paper. She showed the words directly to Rain Pou.

DON'T MOVE.

DON'T HURT ANYONE.

RELEASE TEPSEKEMEI OUTSIDE THE TRAIN.

REMOVE YOUR EARPLUGS

Rain Pou was trapped.

She released Tepsekemei, who collapsed to the ground outside.

She disintegrated her rainbow earplugs.

Just then, the doors of the train closed.

"Wedin!" cried out Tepsekemei.

Too late.

The train sped up, it moved, and Rain Pou was stuck. There were no passengers on the train. This was a one-way trip.

She heard the train’s noises ring in her ears.

Rain Pou can’t move.

Wedin sighed,

However, she also smiled.

“You lose, Rain Pou,” she said from the other end of the train.

Suddenly, Wedin hit an invisible wall, and was sent flying, as the train continued moving. Only 5 seconds later, Rain Pou felt the wall as well.

The sensation was numbing.

The speed of a bullet train, hitting into a wall meant to kill Magical Girls.

The crash hurt her, and damaged her head, her skull, her brain.

Both Magical Girls were prevented from leaving by the barrier, and the train continued going. The Magical Girls’ bodies pierced through the train cars as they continued moving.

The force of their strength derailed one of the cars.

An explosion, burning, can’t breathe, body crushed and destroyed, last bits of life.

Pain…

Wedin’s body was beside Rain Pou’s, mangled and crushed.

Rain Pou too was dying…

She can’t fulfill Pukin’s orders…

☆ **Pythie Frederica (Remaining Time: 35 Minutes)**

It was unfortunate, but necessary.

Frederica saw the smoke in the train station. She tried to use Wedin's hair to find her. Nothing appeared.

That confirms it. She's dead.

Rain Pou is dead too.

Frederica had told Wedin that it may be a one-way trip.

Sacrifices had to be made. Rain Pou needed to be killed, but Frederica didn't want the promise to stick to her.

And so it was planned from the start.

Killing two birds with one stone.

After diving into the train. Frederica switched places with Wedin, and although Frederica had warned her that the train will leave immediately, Wedin still agreed.

Frederica's promise was to not take hostile action against the girls, but she never had to help them if they were in danger.

Now to test it.

Frederica went to use Tepsekemei's hair, intending on punching her.

But… she couldn't.

Hm… Well played.

It seems the promise really is permanent, even after Wedin has died. That will be… troublesome.

Speaking of Tepsekemei, she had arrived near Frederica.

"Wedin is dead. Rain Pou is dead too. Mei is… sad."

"I can see that, Tepsekemei. You know who isn't dead? Pukin. Go to her, your friends are waiting."

Tepsekemei was silent, but nodded.

She thinned herself and flew with the speed of the wind.

Frederica smiled. That's one down. If this plan worked as well, then Frederica will leave here with a profit, and not a loss.

☆ **Funny Trick (Remaining Time: 35 Minutes)**

According to 7753, the way Funny Trick's powers worked is this,

Funny Trick is able to switch two objects that are hidden from view.

The objects must be hidden from everyone. If it is a person, it must be hidden from everyone except for the person being affected.

The first object must be within 100 meters of Funny Trick, in a radius.

The second object must be within 50 meters of the first object.

Funny Trick must know the exact location of the objects, within a small margin of error. She cannot estimate it.

The last part is why Funny Trick cannot transport herself. She can't estimate when she's hidden from everything.

But now, now she was part of a plan to kill Pukin.

She had a smoke bomb in hand, with a piece of cloth ready as well. Kuru-Kuru Hime, with her ribbon drill and shield, were fighting Pukin.

She had to see Pukin. She just had to time it right.

Come on… why won't Pukin do it? Everyone has to do it at some point, even Magical Girls.

Kuru-Kuru Hime seemed troubled as well, because Pukin isn't doing it. She's focused on the fight, so much so that she's not doing the thing that Funny Trick needed her to do.

Kuru-Kuru Hime stepped backwards a few feet.

It looks like she's going to force Pukin to do it if she didn't want to.

If Pukin wouldn't blink, then Hime will force her to.

Kuru-Kuru Hime increased the spin of her ribbon drill, and drilled the ground below her, the sound that it makes was large.

It created a gust of dust aimed straight for Pukin's face. Pukin was stunned, and instinctively, she closed her eyes.

Now!

Funny Trick performed the exchange. She removed the cloth on her end. What was once a smoke bomb was now Pukin's right eyeball.

"AAARRGHGHH GHAAAAAAH!!!" screamed Pukin as she clutched her right eye socket.

Instantly, Pukin stabbed her own leg with her rapier, and the smoke bomb exploded, sending a large cloud of smoke centered on Pukin.

We did it!

Kuru-Kuru Hime relaxed at last in the smoke cloud.

"YES!!! SHE'S DEAD!" screamed out Funny Trick.

The explosion was large. Despite being a Magical Girl, if their vitals were ever hit, they would die just like anyone.

It should've hit Pukin's brain, it should be enough to kill her.

But… from the smoke…

A rapier was thrown straight towards Funny Trick.

"ACK!... Ngh!?"

Funny Trick looked down at her chest. The rapier had stabbed her. Blood flowed down.

…*How?*

…She should be dead.

Kuru-Kuru Hime saw the whole thing and was just as shocked. “KAYO!”

Walking slightly wobbled, Pukin went straight for Funny Trick, stepping on the rapier, digging the wound deeper.

Funny Trick saw Pukin’s face.

The right half of her face is gone… Just gone… Blood and guts coming out of it. Yet she was smiling.

Pukin pulled the rapier painfully from Funny Trick.

“I don’t die… That easily… little girl…”

“Gk… Gak... Ngh…”

Pukin headed straight for Kuru-Kuru Hime.

Blood was flowing from Funny Trick’s chest. She coughed it out. She felt cold.
Is this how it ends?

Was this how it’ll be?

It can’t… end like this.

Umi wouldn’t have given up in this situation.

She had so many regrets. She was in a unique position to make Umi less of an annoyance… if she had given her a chance as a kid.

Now her friends will die if she gave up on life.

She needs to be strong. Her body is weakening.

I’m sorry…

☆ 7753 (Remaining Time: 33 Minutes)

7753 had been watching in disbelief from the sidelines.

Pukin sliced Kuru-Kuru Hime's ribbons apart, and stabbed her in the stomach.

"YOU! You're that old man's daughter, aren't you? I killed your father in cold blood, and he didn't even get a chance to breathe."

7753 saw Hime's eyes. Fear and anger mixed into one, as Pukin stabbed her over and over with her rapier and brought her face close to hers.

"He was looking for you, you know? Now he'll finally get to see you again. *Die like he did*!"

Pukin slashed Hime's throat,

Hime coughed out blood, and put her hands on her throat as she collapsed down to the ground, blood pouring from it.

7753 can't fight. But everyone's dying.

What is this?

How is this possible?

7753 toggled her goggles on Pukin. Her life force is still 3 out of 5. But her brains are almost shot out.

Then she saw the status.

Under mind control of rapier.

The stab before the explosion.

She switched the dials.

Orders: So long as your will is strong, you will ignore any damage.

And Pukin's willpower is strong…

Her magic is not based on belief. Her magic is that. Magic. Pukin's will for vengeance and killing outweighs the damage that her body is enduring.

She’s surviving…

…through sheer willpower.

The strength of a Magical Girl.

Pukin has lived through hell. Over 200 years in prison. She hasn’t become a mental vegetable because her own willpower is just *that strong*.

No one is left. Funny Trick and Kuru-Kuru Hime were defeated, and dying. Pukin walked over straight to 7753.

Pukin walked…

Even though her will to live is strong, she’s still bound by the rules of her own physical body. It won’t let her run, and she’s slowing down.

Maybe 7753 had a chance.

She may not have fought before, but now she had no choice.

That’s when she felt a hand on her shoulder.

“I told you you’d get in my way.”

Mana?

But Mana had agreed not to participate due to her being a Mage. What is she doing.

“Mana, you’ll die.”

“Not if I can help it. Besides… that bastard killed my sister.”

Mana injected a syringe. Healing Medicine. Increasing the strength and durability of her body.

7753 saw Mana’s stats increase. Still not up to Magical Girl standards yet.

Mana injected another.

“Mana, you’ll overdose! Don’t!”

She injected another one.

Mana's eyes widened. She gritted her teeth. Her stats were rising through the roof, but her heartrate was also increasing.

Mana injected another one.

"Mana, that's enough!"

"Not yet…. Need… one more… Ngh…. Gah!!"

She injected a final syringe.

Mana's stats were now comparable to that of a Magical Girl. But she only has about a few seconds before her heart may give in.

"HEY! YOU *BITCH*! YOU WANT ME!? COME ON!"

Pukin turned her half-head around towards Mana, grinning as she clumsily ran towards her.

"COME ON YOU UGLY SON OF A BITCH!"

Mana took out her cane. Pukin swung for her, it was deflected by Mana.

Mana used the momentum of the block to stab her cane towards Pukin's wounded face. Pukin screamed like a wild animal, and went to stab Mana, but Mana defended herself with her cloak, impenetrable.

Mana wailed on Pukin, using her cane to stab and swing at her, aiming mostly for her missing face.

15 seconds passed.

7753 sensed it. Mana had the upper hand, but not for long.

No time to argue.

7753 rushed forward.

Mana stopped fighting, and she clutched her chest, eyes widened, pupils red with veins. Pukin saw her chance, she readier her rapier, but 7753 tackled her.

“I told you… stay out of this, 7753… you’re not dying!”

“Sorry, Mana-NGAAAAH”

Pukin stabbed 7753 in the right arm. Pukin then grabbed 7753’s right arm, with her rapier still sticking through it, and twisted it.

CRACK!

“Gk… GAH!”

Mana injected herself with another syringe. Her movements were wobbly, but she went straight for Pukin, shoulder charging her.

7753 felt numb in her right arm, blood and pain shot through. Pukin kneed 7753, and pushed her away as Mana crashed into her.

7753 landed on the ground, right arm first. The pain intensified.

It was broken. Bleeding and broken.

From the ground, 7753 struggled to stand. She saw Mana and Pukin exchanging blows. Mana expertly deflecting Pukin, and constantly attacking Pukin as much as she can.

Mana stabbed her cane on through the missing half of Pukin’s right face. Pukin screamed, but she responded by kneeing Mana.

Mana took a step backwards, injecting another syringe on her knee.

Mana’s breathing looked sore. Her body can’t take this many.

“DAMMIT! WHY WON’T YOU JUST DIE ALREADY!?”

Slowly, 7753 saw a large ribbon moving around Pukin. Looking to the right, she saw Kuru-Kuru Hime, mortally wounded, eyes filled with hatred. A pool of blood forming on her.

Magical Girls don’t die easily.

Their willpower, whether motivated by vengeance or something else, can often keep them alive longer than they should.

The ribbons then covered Pukin completely, and Pukin had no time to react.

In a split second, the ribbons fell, and a single stone was in the place of Pukin.

7753 looked to her left. She saw Funny Trick, who had dragged herself in a trail of blood to rest in the branch of a tree, clutching her chest, eyes nearly over.

Both of them had a Life Force of 1 out of 5.

7753 saw a pile of stones, Pukin's hand, limp, sticking out of the pile.

Blood dripping from them.

I see…

The stones were placed in the middle of the barrier. They weren't magic, so they could be in the middle of the barrier itself.

Funny Trick had switched Pukin's body with one of the stones inside the pile.

When both the Magical Girls saw it. Funny Trick smiled and closed her eyes. She de-transformed back into Kayo Nemura.

Kuru-Kuru Hime as well, unable to move her body, took her last breath, and de-transformed back to Nozomi Himeno.

The two were gone. Satisfied.

Mana, clutching her chest, on her knees, eyes wide. Coughing blood.

7753 saw her stats slowly return to what she was, but her body was attempting to hold back every fiber of the excess power.

Mana collapsed on her back. Her breathing became rough,

She glanced at 7753, her voice frail as she smiled,

"We did it… We did it… right?"

7753 weakly nodded.

Mana's eyes rolled back, 7753 saw her stats. She had fainted. Her body attempting to bring her back to her original self took a toll on her.

7753 couldn't stand. Her right arm is broken, and her ribs were broken as well. It'll heal in time, but so many around her had died…

…Then the stone pile moved.

No…

It can't be.

No no no no

Out popped Pukin's head, smiling and grinning, as she grasped her rapier with her right arm.

Pukin dragged herself out of the stone pile. Her lower body is outside the barrier. Her upper body is left, bleeding.

She went straight for 7753, crawling and dragging her whole body as she grinned madly.

All of her plans.

Her strategies.

All of it for nothing?

7753 couldn't move. Her body hurts. She's going to die or become a puppet. She was afraid.

Everyone else was either dead or unconscious.

She looked into the sky.

She saw… a person flying down.

…A genie?

Tepsekemei.

Pukin saw it too. Tepsekemei flew with the speed of a gust of wind, as thin as she could. Pukin attempted to swing her sword, but when she did…

…7753 saw a hand appear from out of nowhere, grabbing the rapier, and pulling it towards her.

Frederica?

With no sword, Pukin had no weapon.

Tepsekemei didn't even stop to think. 7753 could tell. She was angry. She was angry at everyone who hurt her friends.

She became gaseous, and entered Pukin's body through the large hole on the right side of her face.

Pukin's expression turned painful.

She began coughing. She tried to breathe. Her face stiffened.

And then…

…Pukin's entire body exploded, as Tepsekemei solidified herself inside of Pukin.

No matter what Pukin's magic did. Without a body, she can't do much. She was finally…

She was finally dead…

Tepsekemei, dirty with blood and guts, looked around.

"Tepsekemei… Hehe… You're alive…" said 7753.

"But Wedin is dead. Rain Pou is dead too," said Tepsekemei.

"Yeah… everyone's gone… except for me… and Mana…" said 7753. Every word she said hurt her body.

7753 laid on the ground. It's over.

Her goggles displayed something.

Whatever you did, it stopped the Land of Magic from launching the weapon. B-City is safe.

7753 laughed. Tears were streaming through her face, and she laughed.

“Why are you laughing? Are you happy? Mei is sad. All of Mei’s friends are dead…”

“No, Mei… I’m not laughing I’m… I’m crying,” said 7753 with a smile as she sniffled at what has just transpired.

Everyone’s dead. The city’s saved, but everyone’s dead.

“Are you happy… or are you sad”

“I don’t know… A little bit of both, maybe?”

“Mei is confused.”

“Me too, Mei… Me too…”

“Mei is sad, but Mei can’t cry. Mei hasn’t… learned how to cry.”

“It’s okay… It’s over now, Mei… Everything’s okay again…”

The pain made 7753’s body numb.

Now would be a good time to rest. Yeah… A nice long rest…

7753 closed her eyes, and let unconsciousness take her.

Epilogue

☆ **Shadow Gale**

The garden was cool this time of year. It was almost Christmas time, and the skies were cooling. Snow hasn't yet fallen, but the rains were getting more frequent.

The hedge maze was the highlight of the Hitokouji manor.

Mamori had approached the center of the maze. There, she found the head of the Hitokouji house, Kanoe.

She was sitting in a chair, working around with her tablet, hooked up to her Magical Phone.

She noticed Mamori.

"You're late."

"I took the scenic route."

Mamori placed the food and tea in the table.

"Have a seat, Mamori," said Kanoe with a smile.

Mamori took a seat down. Kanoe sipped the tea, and slipped an envelope towards her.

"What's this?"

"A reward."

"I've never been given a reward before. What for?"

"Your work, of course."

"You know I work for you because of my loyalty, not money, my Lady."

"Hmhm, that's just like you, Mamori. I know that. This isn't from me, it's from the Land of Magic."

“Land of Magic?”

Mamori opened the envelope.

“40,000 Yen?”

“45, actually.”

“What’s this for?”

“Your part in helping Human Resources.”

“I still don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“The goggles. About a few months back?”

“Goggles? Oh, those… That was quite a while ago.”

“Your powers have grown, Mamori. To make a simple communication device, I knew you could do that. But a log deletion, adding audio-visual detection, and a signal disruptor. That’s impressive.”

“I’ve been meaning to ask. Why did you want me to have a signal disruptor added to the goggles?”

“It’s part of a precautionary measure.”

“My Lady… you’re not doing something bad, are you?”

“Do you doubt me?”

“Yes. Because it’s you. I care about you, and I don’t want to see you go back to... before. Not after what we’ve been through.”

Kanoe looked at her tablet. She took a deep breath and sipped her tea,

“Don’t worry too much about me, Mamori. Come, eat up.”
Mamori grabbed a macaron, and she chewed it. Delicious, but she was still uneasy.

“What are you reading, my Lady?”

“A report from someone working under me.”

“The new girl?”

“No, a previous employee.”

“Oh?”

“Yes. The information she gave me was enough to start my project, but unfortunately, it’ll have to be temporarily delayed.”

“How is she now? The Fairy, right?”

“Yes. She snooped around a little too much.”

“Oh, I see.”

“Unfortunately, I had to terminate her contract. But the information she got me was still useful.”

Kanoe turned off her tablet, “I’d like to tell you about current events, if you don’t mind. Get my mind off things.”

“Of course.”

“I’ve been… quite busy ever since I was promoted inside Human Resources.”

“Looks like you’ve been handling it quite well.”

“Quite the opposite. The Land of Magic is a place of checks, power balances, and intrigue. Divisions are fighting amongst each other, trying to gain an upper hand.”

“Really?”

“All it takes is one small rumor to send one of them overreacting. Like the Foreign Affairs Division. Perhaps it’s tradition, but they’re not fans of the Examination Division.”

“All these Divisions are pretty broad.”

“You get to used to it. Recently, an assassin was loose in B-City, and thanks to an unfortunate rumor about how dangerous the assassin is, they sent their Ace.”

“Their Ace?”

“Their most powerful member in the Foreign Affairs Division. They also placed a barrier on B-City. She died there, unfortunately.”

“The Assassin was that good?”

“No, it wasn’t the Assassin. There was a jailbreak earlier too. 4 rogue Magical Girls escaped.”

“Huh? A jailbreak? How? I thought those prisons had strict security and rotations.”

“Mm. Strict. Unless you know where to look. Find the right people and persuade them enough and they might just let you in on a hole during the rotation. Every security detail has holes in them, after all.”

“What happened?”

“3 of them were killed, handled by the Examination Division. The Assassin was killed too. One of them escaped.”

“That’s bad, isn’t it?”

“Perhaps. She’s not as dangerous physically as the other 3, and having just one escape isn’t as bad as all four.”

“I see.”

“Now the rest of the Divisions are scrambling to reorganize, and there’s a slight power vacuum of sorts.”

“Is that so?”

“I hope I’m not boring you, Mamori.”

“No, it’s just… I’m not quite sure what’s going on, honestly.”

“Hmhm, you’re the only one I can talk to about this.”

“Why’s that?”

“Because you’re the only one I trust to talk to about these things, Mamori.”

“I’m sure there are others.”

“I want there to be others. I want the Land of Magic to follow what they claim to follow. If we were in a position to reform them, things might be different. But as of now, there are still those within them that seek to simply use Magical Girls to fulfill their own political goals.”

Reform? What’s all this talk about reforming?

Kanoe sipped her tea, with a serious look on her face.

“Are you okay, my Lady?”

“It’s fine, Mamori. I just went on a tangent, sorry.”

Water began dripping from the sky.

“Oh, it’s raining. Come, let’s go inside before the food gets wet.”

☆ **Pythie Frederica**

It was raining hard outside, but the inside of the house was quite clean.

Rows and rows of books and medicine. Homely, wooden texture, and a nice big bed.

On the bed was a wounded girl, covered in bandages. Pythie Frederica had checked on the girl occasionally as well.

The girl groaned as she began to wake up.

Pythie came inside, “Ah, you’re awake. Hush now, it’s time for your medicine.”

“…I don’t like the medicine.”

“Why not?”

“…My throat hurts. It’s hard to swallow,” said the girl with a weak voice.

“Let me check your wounds.”

Pythie unwrapped some of the bandages. Some of the scars had begun to heal on the girl. Pythie smiled, and wrapped them back up again.

It didn't matter if she didn't use new bandages. A Magical Girl is able to heal herself fast.

"You're healing! Good, good!"

"…Really?"

"Yes! Really! I'll go get your medicine. It'll be easy to swallow, I promise."

Pythie took a large pill from her shelf. She mashed the pills into three smaller pieces. She powdered them up.

"Alright, open up!"

The girl opened her mouth, Pythie spoonfed her the medicine.

Three spoonfuls. The girl swallowed each of them, and kept her mouth open.

"You can close it now,"

The girl nodded and closed her mouth.

"Mind if I sit next to you?"

The girl nodded, and scooched over slowly.

Pythie placed the girl's head on her shoulder. She lightly touched the girl's left eye, scarred.

"…That tickles."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

The girl didn't have a left arm, and her left eye was scarred. This girl, her name…

Ripple.

Pythie placed Ripple's hair between her fingers. She stroked it and combed her long, black, glossy, flowing hair.

It was smooth, her fingers sliding over it easily.

She had cared for Ripple for a few months as she healed, making sure to keep her hair in perfect condition as well.

After stealing Pukin’s sword, Ripple was now fully under her control.

Snow White was the true ideal Magical Girl, but as of now, she won’t ever rejoin Pythie again.

And so Pythie had two options.

She could recreate and raise her own Magical Girl, to become the ideal one that she desired.

Or she could use her to lure Snow White.

Either way, the end result is the ideal Magical Girl.

“Once you’re fully healed, I’d like to teach you about being the ideal Magical Girl. Would that be okay?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Do you remember anything?”

Ripple shook her head.

Pythie had erased all memories of Ripple. She’s a blank slate now. Like a newborn baby. She had to be taught. She believed in Pythie. She loved Pythie now.

“That’s too bad. You don’t even know about ideal Magical Girls?”

“No… What’s an ideal Magical Girl?”

“Someone who I wish to be, or wish to know. The perfect Magical Girl. I can teach you to become that Magical Girl.”

“The perfect one? You can teach me?”

“Yes! I can teach you.”

“Do you like it if I become an ideal Magical Girl?”

“Of course, my child. Of course, I will!”

“To be loved and appreciated by you… That makes me so happy, Master,” said Ripple, eyes glazed and smiling.

“Then let’s begin. Together, we’ll change the world.”